

LIFE STORIES:
RELATING OUR STORIES TO
THE BIBLICAL STORY

A Professional Project
submitted to the faculty of the
School of Theology at Claremont
in partial fulfillment of
the requirement for the degree
Doctor of Ministry

ROBERT FLAHERTY

MAY 1982

This professional project, completed by

Robert L. Flaherty,
*has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty
of the School of Theology at Claremont in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of*

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

Faculty Committee

Mary Elizabeth Moore
Alan D. Rhoads

April 15, 1982
Date

Joseph C. Hays
Dean

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1-14
Prurpose of the Project	1
Significance of the Project	1
Hypotheses	2
Definitions	5
Contexts for the Lessons	7
What Others Have Done	9
Scope and Limitations	12
Procedure for the Project	13
II. LIFE STORIES: SOME THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS	15-55
What is Story?	16
Adequacy of Story	36
The Power of Story to Affect Change	45
The Use of Story in the Lessons	50
III. SIX LESSONS FOR USE IN THE CHURCH	56-109
Lesson 1: Discovering Your Story	58
Lesson 2: Your Story and the Biblical Story	67
Lesson 3: "Passing Over" to the Standpoint of Biblical Characters	76
Lesson 4: Expressing Religious Convictions Through Your Story	91
Lesson 5: The Action of Your Story	96
Lesson 6: Change and Be Changed	106
IV. CONCLUSION	110-112
BIBLIOGRAPHY	113

ABSTRACT

Urban Holmes has written, "It is the task of ministry to help us get our stories together!"¹ This professional project has been written as an attempt to work at the task. The stories it seeks to help persons tell are life stories which have been influenced by biblical stories.

The project consists of a series of six lessons intended to help persons relate their stories to biblical stories and of a theory of story which makes possible the relationship. Story is shown to be a means through which persons both discover and convey their personal sense of meaning. Because stories have an interpretive quality, i.e., stories interpret events and experiences, persons interpret events and experiences of their lives for themselves and others by telling life stories.

As one makes changes in one's life story, one's sense of meaning changes. One's life changes. Critical evaluation of one's story often precipitates such change. The evaluation takes place as one is challenged by feedback from another who listens to the story or as one compares his or her story and the attendant convictions with another's.

¹Urban T. Holmes, Ministry and Imagination (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), p. 186.

The lessons provide opportunity for persons to evaluate their stories in both ways. Participants tell episodes of their own life stories and listen to those of others. Comparison of the stories and attendant convictions carries potential transformation. Particular attention is given to comparing one's story with the biblical story, convictions expressed through one's story with convictions expressed in biblical stories. Through comparison persons open their story and, consequently, their life to the transforming influence of the biblical story.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Project.

The purpose of this project is expressed in the subtitle, "Relating Our Stories to the Biblical Story." The aim of the lessons included in the project (Chapter III) is to help persons relate their stories to the biblical stories. Some of the exercises of the lessons involve persons in a critical evaluation of their own stories. In other exercises persons evaluate biblical stories and compare their stories with the biblical stories. My hope is that as persons relate their stories to the biblical stories, they will experience transformation.

Significance of the Project.

My work with persons in the church has made me aware of the frustration many experience over being inarticulate about what they believe and the hesitency many have to talk about convictional experience. This awareness has prompted me to seek a way to help interested persons overcome these obstacles. Starting with what one knows best, one's own life experience, the project seeks to help persons narrate their experience and consider the theological meaning of the narration.

Holmes has emphasised that "it is the task of ministry to help us get our stories together!"¹ Putting one's story together involves telling and interpreting one's experience. The routine of living often numbs one's sense of life's significance. "When this happens," writes Wink, "the sense of importance is the attached to the need to make these experience intelligible in a framework of larger significance."² The exercises of the project aim at helping persons regain the sense of importance. The larger framework within which this project seeks to place one's experience is the biblical story. Biblical images, themes, symbols, and stories offer a language for interpretation. Thus, the Bible interprets us as we interpret it.

Hypotheses.

I make four assumptions that are the working hypotheses for this project.

1. Persons have stories to tell, but have not been encouraged to tell them. A "tendency in much of modern theology [is] to discredit convictional experiences."³

¹Urban T. Holmes, Ministry and Imagination (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), p. 186.

²Charles E. Wink, Practical Hermeneutics: A Revised Agenda for the Ministry (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1980), p. 26.

³James E. Loder, The Transforming Moment: Understanding Convictional Experiences (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), p. 11.

The emphasis placed on cognitive, confessional faith has given theology over to the experts, i.e., theologians and theologically trained clergy. Further, the notion of theological pluralism, despite its strengths has at least this weakness: when the integrity of the individual to develop and articulate his or her own theological convictions receives high regard, persons who look to the "experts" for guidance are often overwhelmed by the number of options offered and confused by the open stance of the "experts." The "experts" intend to free persons to draw their own conclusions. They assume persons will indeed reflect upon issues of ultimate concern. But, in reality many church members conclude: "Since it does not matter what I believe, why bother?" "It is too deep for me. I will leave that to the pastor." Or, despairingly, "I do not know what I believe." Merely assuming persons will attend to their religious convictions is inadequate. They must be encouraged and even helped along the way.

To help or encourage a person to tell his or her story does not imply the desired end product is a stereotyped story. The integrity of individuals to develop and articulate their own convictions must be maintained. Individuals can hold very different theological views and still find it useful to examine their personal story vis-a-vis the biblical story.

2. Story telling is an effective way to help

persons talk naturally about the things that concern them most. Everyday conversation is made up of stories to a great extent. Through stories persons tell one another where they have been, what they have done, what they have experienced, how and why they have done what they have done and so on. One conveys one's feelings, attitudes, thoughts and values. One interprets the world and one's place in it. Persons shift from light stories to very serious stories in a matter of minutes. Stories, therefore, appear to be a natural means for sharing even the most serious concerns.

3. Story has power to change hearer and narrator.

One who listens sympathetically to a story is drawn into it. He or she begins to see reality through the eyes of another. This experience changes the way one perceives reality for oneself. Thus, stories have power to change hearers. When one tells a story, often he or she evokes a story from the listener. The role is changed. The narrator becomes the hearer. He or she then opens himself or herself to change. Further, as one repeats one's story, it changes. These changes reflect the narrator's changing self understanding.

4. The biblical stories help us interpret our lives and, therefore, our stories. Through this project I am attempting to help persons compare their stories with the biblical stories. These stories have power to

transform those who will hear them. The Bible contains stories which have been preserved through at least three millennia by people of faith. The people of faith have preserved and retold the stories because they told of their past and helped them interpret their present. Christians today preserve and retell the biblical stories for the same reasons the people of faith in ancient time preserved and retold them.

Definitions.

Story. Story is used in a nontechnical way in this project. It is a narrative sequence of events. Of special interest are life stories, i.e., those stories people tell about events and experiences in their own lives. Through their stories, persons interpret their experience. Their stories indicate what meaning they attach to the narrated events and experiences. In the next chapter I have developed in more detail what I mean by story.

Experience. Experience refers to events in a person's life which happen to the person or in which the person is an agent. Included are the person's encounters in and apprehensions of the external world. For example, one may experience the care of another person or may act caringly toward another. Also included are interior experiences, i.e., that which happens within a person. Thoughts, reflections, dreams and feelings are examples.

Meaning. This term is used in two senses. When referring to meaning conveyed by story it is used in a general sense. It includes subjective levels of human understanding and interpretation. When persons tell their life stories, they indicate what they understand to be the meaning of the events and experiences contained in their story.

The term is also used in another sense. In the next chapter I have contrasted meaning conveyed by story and "meaning" conveyed by "statements." Both "meaning" and "statement" in that context are narrowly defined. I have used these terms as they are used within the analytic school of philosophy. To distinguish the specialized usage when these or other terms, e.g., "true" or "false," are so used I shall place them in quotation marks.

A "statement" is "meaningful" if it is subject to verification. If an utterance is not subject to verification, it is, in the strictest sense, void of "meaning," at least logical or literal "meaning."

"Statement." This term is also used in the next chapter as it is used within the analytic school. A "statement" is an utterance which can be verified to be "true" or "false" by observation, experimentation or analysis of terms. A "statement" is "true" if the process of verification shows it to be so. It is "false" if the process of verification shows it to be so.

"Pseudostatement." If an utterance is not subject to verification, it has no literal or logical "meaning." Therefore, it is not a "statement," but a "pseudostatement."

Truth. This term is also used in two senses. In the next chapter I shall show that stories convey the convictions of what the story teller believes to be true.

"Truth" also has a specialized meaning when used as it is in the analytic school. "True" indicates a correspondence between a "statement" and empirical or analytic verification. Empirical verification includes experimentation and observation. Analytic verification refers to the analysis of definitions. "False" within the analytic school indicates a lack of correspondence between a "statement" and empirical or analytic verification.

Contexts for the Lessons.

The lessons are intended for use among adult groups. Since the lessons call for exercises which involve a high degree of participation, a small group is preferred over a large one. The optimum number would be around twelve. Of course, larger groups could be subdivided for some of the exercises. Three or four would be a minimum number.

The overall aim of the lessons is to bring our story and the biblical story together. This aim is congruent with several aspects of the church's work and mission. And so,

the lessons could be used in several contexts.

The lessons could be used to train persons for personal witnessing, visitation or evangelism. On the assumption that story telling is an effective way for persons to talk naturally about things that concern them most, persons may find that these lessons help them confidently express their religious convictions.

From time to time persons have opportunity to witness to their religious convictions on an informal basis. Those who wish to develop their skill of witnessing to friends and neighbors would find this series of lessons helpful. Churches that wish to encourage members to witness to friends and neighbors in a rather spontaneous way would find this series useful to equip persons for the task.

Opportunities for visitation of all kinds, e.g., visitation of shut-ins, of persons who have expressed interest in the church, of persons in hospitals or other institutions, of persons who are new to a neighborhood, abound in the church. One of the immediate concerns persons have when they are asked to participate in a visitation program is "what would I say?" They may find life stories are a helpful way of beginning conversation. This series of lessons could be used to train persons for visitation teams.

In some churches members of the congregation study sermon texts with the preacher before the sermon. One of

the problems a preacher constantly faces is how to bring the biblical story and life stories together. Working with some of the exercises in these lessons could be part of the bridge.

Persons involved in the Christian education program of the church, as well as preachers, search for ways to bring the biblical story to bear upon the lives of students. These lessons could be incorporated into a teacher training event. Teachers and prospective teachers would gain new insights into their own convictions and into the biblical story.

The series could be used with a class in which persons wish to explore their own experience and religious convictions. The preceding uses have suggested ways in which the lessons could be used as a means to an end. Here I am suggesting they be used as an end in themselves.

What Others Have Done.

Story has been a significant theological method for the last decade. To assign a precise date to the rise of the current interest is a difficult task. Several books with this focus broke into print in the early seventies. The topic was one of the themes of the Philosophy of Religion and Theology section of the American Academy of Religion's meeting in 1974.

The value of story for preaching has been discussed

by Craddock and Jensen. Navone, Wiggins, and Novak have explored the power of story for conveying theological meaning. Sanders, Wink, Shea and Fackre have investigated the influence of story on biblical theology and hermeneutics. Keen, Wink and Winkquist have talked about the significance of story for pastoral care. McClendon and Keen have taken special notice of biography as a source for theological insight.

My project draws from the interests of many of these scholars. However, no one has undertaken to do precisely what this project attempts. Keen and Fox, Holmes, and Wink come close to doing what I propose.

Keen and Fox' orientation is more psychological than the orientation of this project. For Fox and Keen "telling stories amounts to a new way of defining personality and psychology."⁴ They intend to help persons discover themselves through the use of symbols and images. Television, art, mythology and fairy tales are sources from which they draw symbols. This project seeks to help persons discover their stories in relation to the biblical stories. To be sure, symbols and images are important for this project, but they are drawn primarily from two sources: the biblical literature and the reflections of participants. Persons

⁴Sam Keen and Anne Valley Fox, Telling Your Story: A Guide to Who You Are and Who You Can Be (New York: Doubleday, 1973), p. 3.

who do these exercises might associate symbols and images which are personally relevant to them or biblical symbols and images with those they have come to know from sources Keen and Fox would use. These would not be disallowed, but they are secondary to the intent of this project.

Holmes proposes people tell fair tales to get at self-discovery. He recognizes the psychological value of enabling persons to tell their stories so that they "unveil for the conscious awareness the story they are living out."⁵ He asks persons to write their own fairy tales as a "means of opening up the story of the person to identification and analysis."⁶ One example he deals with at some length comes out of one of his workshops. He shows how an imaginative tale, "The Girl with the Red Balloon," provides insight into its author. My approach to the stories of individuals involves recollections of their experience. The exercises in the lessons include listing steppingstones, i.e., important events in the history of the individual from birth to present; reflecting on past experiences; narrating past events; logging and reflecting upon activities in a given day.

Wink proposes persons enter into the biblical story much the way persons enter into their dreams in Gestalt

⁵Holmes, p. 170.

⁶Ibid., p. 186.

dream work. His aim and my aim in this project are to help persons bring the biblical stories to bear upon our stories. I have developed lesson three following his method. But, I have suggested four other methods of bringing the biblical materials to bear upon our stories, i.e., comparing propositions derived from the biblical stories with convictions implicit in our stories; telling a biblical story as our story; using a biblical story as a pattern or model for our story; and comparing biblical images, symbols and myths with our story.

In that this project seeks to help persons discover their own stories it is psychological. In that it seeks to help persons get into the biblical story through its characters, symbols and concepts it is biblical and theological.

Scope and Limitations.

The very nature of story imposes limits as well as opens possibilities for communication. Story is not a medium in which one can easily convey propositions subject to verification. Story is narration. Through stories persons locate themselves in their world. The stories persons have learned from childhood identified them in relation to their family. Likewise, story helps one locate oneself within larger social structures and within systems including the cosmos. Stories deal with concrete events, specific instances,

not generalizations or principles. Yet stories point us to the larger structures of reality through symbol, image and metaphor. They offer an invitation to participate in the life and situation of another, to look at the world from a new perspective. This invitation is not argument, but it can be persuasive and can lead to transformation.

Symbols, metaphors and images are important to stories. Keen and Fox help persons relate their personal symbols, metaphors and images with those available in art, mythology and fairy tales in order to help them express ultimate concern. Symbols, metaphors and images offer insight into self and possibilities for growth. The focus of this project is intentionally on biblical symbols, metaphors and images and their usefulness for our story. This focus limits the scope of the project. It also becomes my contribution to work done in this area. My intention is not to set my work over against what has been done nor to suggest that all images which shape a person's self understanding should be drawn from the Bible. Rather, I view this project alongside previous work and hope that those who participate in the study will be enriched by the focus.

Procedure for the Project.

This project involves both theory and practice. In the next chapter I have laid a theoretical foundation

for the lessons which follow in chapter three. The aim of the lessons is to help persons relate the stories of their life experiences to the biblical story. The lessons are written with an adult audience in mind.

With regard to the educational model underlying the lessons, I have been influenced by Groom's suggested "components of a shared praxis,"⁷ which include action, critical reflection, dialogue and relation to the story, i.e., Bible and tradition. The lessons involve narrating life experiences, reflecting critically upon the narrations, dialogue among participants and critical reflection and comparison with the biblical story.

⁷Thomas H. Groome, Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), pp. 184-197.

CHAPTER II

LIFE STORIES: SOME THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Within the last decade story has enjoyed a good deal of attention as a theological method. Scholars have considered the nature of story as a medium for conveying religious conviction, the implications of story for hermeneutics, and its applications to teaching and preaching. My interest for this project is to consider story as a medium for expressing religious conviction. Through this project I hope to help persons relate their stories and the attendant convictions to the biblical story.

In this chapter I shall lay the theoretical foundation for the lessons which follow. I shall begin by considering what is story. One concern in this first section is to show what meaning is conveyed by story. To do this I contrast story with scientific language. A second concern is to show how one interprets events and experiences in one's life through story. I suggest that how one tells one's story and the details one includes in the story influence interpretation.

The contrast of story and scientific language also functions in the second section of the chapter. Meaning conveyed by story differs from that conveyed by scientific language. This difference necessitates a difference in the way one critically evaluates each. Analytic philosophers

have argued that one critically evaluates scientific language by verification. In this second section, I propose that a story be critically evaluated in terms of its adequacy.

In the third section I suggest how story affects change in both the story teller and the hearer. The meaning conveyed by one's story is tested for adequacy. Inadequacies may prompt a story teller to make adjustments and thus make his or her story more adequate. Such adjustment can result in personal change. In the third section I shall show how this change comes about. A hearer also tests the adequacy of a story. The hearer then compares aspects of his or her own story with those of the story teller. The comparison may lead the hearer to discoveries of inadequacy in his or her own story. Such discovery may prompt adjustments and lead to change.

In the final section of the chapter I shall show how these theoretical considerations apply to the lessons which follow.

WHAT IS STORY?

Story is a narrative sequence of events. The stories of interest for this project are those of individuals. Thus, the stories which are the aim of this project are narrations of life events, events which are remembered and reflected upon by the person out of whose

life experience they are drawn.

In this section I shall further qualify "story" by considering two of its characteristics. Meaning, as it is conveyed by story, is one characteristic I shall consider. I shall contrast story with scientific language to show how the meaning conveyed by story differs from the "meaning" of scientific language. A second characteristic is the interpretive quality of story, i.e., the capacity of story to interpret experience. I shall explore the interpretive quality of story by considering how stories are told and what details are included in a story.

Meaning Conveyed by Story.

I shall begin with a contrast between scientific language and story to show how story conveys meaning differently than scientific language. "Scientific language" here has a very narrow meaning. The phrase is used as it is in the linguistic or analytic school of philosophy. This usage makes for a very clear contrast with story.

Understanding vocabulary used within the analytic school is essential. "Statement," "pseudostatement," "truth," and "meaning" are important terms which have narrow and specific meanings within the analytic school. When using the terms as they are used by analytic philosophers, I shall use quotation marks.

In the analytic school¹ a "meaningful statement" is one of two kinds, an empirical "statement" or an analytic "statement." In either case what makes the "statement" "meaningful" is that its "truth" or "falsity" can be tested. An empirical "statement" can be determined to be "true" or "false" by observation or experimentation. An analytic "statement" can be established by analysis of the definition of terms.

"The ink on this paper is black" is an empirical "statement." It is subject to verification by observation or experimentation. "All circles are round" is an analytic "statement." It can be confirmed by examining definitions.

"Truth" in the analytic school is determined by verification. "Truth" and "meaning" in its strictest sense are related. If a "statement" is "true" it has "meaning." If it is "false" its "meaning" is "false." If an utterance is not subject to verification by observation, experimentation or analysis of definitions, it is in the strictest sense "nonsense" and thus void of "meaning." Such an utterance is a "pseudostatement."

Although analytic philosophers maintain "pseudo-

¹In my presentation of the analytic school I am not representing the opinions of any particular philosopher. Rather, I seek to present what is generally accepted in this school of thought. Representatives of the school include: G. E. Moore, A. J. Ayer, C. L. Stevenson, Ludwig Wittgenstein, R. M. Hare, and John Wisdom.

statements" are literally "nonsense," i.e., void of "meaning," at least void of literal or logical "meaning," some analytic philosophers believe some "pseudostatements" have "emotive meaning," i.e., they express or evoke feelings. "Meaning" is used within the analytic school in both of these senses, literal and emotive. An utterance which has "emotive meaning" is not subject to verification and therefore cannot be determined "true" or "false."

If we could speak only in "statements" that have literal or logical "meaning," our lives would be very sterile. Even if we are granted that some of our utterances have "emotive meaning," we would likely feel our language impoverished. Much of our everyday conversation seems neither to fit this strict definition of "statement" nor to be emotive utterance. Does it follow then that much of what we say is void of meaning? This question must be answered positively if one understands "meaning" as it is understood in the analytic school.

Much theological language is void of "meaning" for strict adherents of the analytic school. The notion that theological language is "nonsense" has sent many theologians searching to discover how theological language is meaningful. McClendon and Smith have presented the attempts of several theologians, as well as their own attempt, to show

how theological language is meaningful.²

Story has emerged as one vehicle by which to express meaning including religious meaning. Meaning, as used here without quotation marks, is used in a more general sense to include the subjective levels of human understanding and interpretation.

Through life stories persons convey self-understanding, i.e., their sense of what it means to be a person and more particularly what they understand to be their personal meaning. Through life stories persons express their understandings of their relations to their world -- families, friends, institutions, society, governments, social and political structures and the cosmos. Many of these relationships have a religious dimension. Religious convictions are reflected in life stories. Through life stories persons interpret their lives to themselves and to others.

From this discussion emerges one of the characteristics of story, viz., story is a vehicle for conveying levels of meaning that are different from the "meaning" conveyed by empirical or analytic "statements." The "meaning" of "statements" is to be found in their verification. Stories, on the other hand, convey one's vision of reality and, thus, one's personal sense of meaning.

²James Wm. McClendon, Jr. and James M. Smith, Understanding Religious Convictions (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975).

The Interpretive Quality of Story.

The second characteristic of story is its interpretive quality. Under this heading I wish to make two points. First, the way stories are told influences interpretation. To make this point I shall discuss principles of story telling. Second, the details which are included in a story influence interpretation.

Through narration one interprets one's experience. The way stories are told influences interpretation. Principles or techniques of story telling govern the way one narrates one's experience. Since these principles shape the interpretation of experience, I have described below the more prominent of these principles. To illustrate many of them I have drawn examples from the biblical story of Ruth. Further, I have suggested how some of these might influence the interpretation of experience.

Scenes. A scene is a structural unit of a story. Through scenes a story teller develops the story's plot and characters. The hearer sees the story unfold in his or her imagination through the story teller's use of scenes. Within a scene a minor or major complication arises and is solved. The solution moves the character toward his or her goal and the plot toward its conclusion. A scene usually ends with the character having made some new resolve, experiencing a change of attitude or experiencing a new

feeling. The solution is usually followed by another scene with a new complication or problem to be solved.

When persons tell stories of their life experiences, they tell them in scenes. Just as complication and its resolution reveal something about a literary character, so complication and resolution reveal character in life stories. By telling their stories in scenes, persons express their own understanding of their character.

Plot, conflict and complication. These three are related. Complication refers to a problem or difficulty a character seeks to overcome. Conflict makes the complication interesting by making solution difficult to reach. Plot is the chain of events that tie the scenes and their complications and conflicts together in a meaningful whole.

The story of Ruth serves to illustrate the interplay of scenes, plot, conflict and complication. Each of the story's five scenes has its own complication which when solved contributes to the plot development.

In the first scene, Ruth 1:6-18, Naomi prepares to leave Moab to return to Bethlehem. Ruth is faced with a decision: where will she place her loyalties, with her homeland and family or with her mother-in-law? The decision Ruth faces is the scene's complication. It is intensified by Naomi's insistence that Ruth and her sister-in-law, Orpha, remain in Moab. The precedent set when Orpah heeds Naomi's advice sets the stage for internal conflict. Ruth

decides to stay with Naomi. The scene ends with Naomi's recognition of her daughter-in-law's resolve. The reader is favorably impressed with Ruth's character.

In scene two, Ruth 1:19-2:16, Ruth reaps barley in the fields of Boaz. Basic survival is the complication of the scene. Where will Ruth and Naomi get food? Ruth solves the complication by harvesting in Boaz' field. The scene functions to introduce a new character, who in the end performs the duties of a kinsman redeemer.

The third scene, Ruth 2:17-23, is a conversation between Ruth and her mother-in-law about Ruth's work during the day. Naomi hints that Boaz may be the person to fulfill her wish for Ruth, namely, that she find a husband.

In scene four, Ruth 3:1-18, Ruth goes to Boaz following Naomi's instructions. The reader expects that in this scene Ruth will find a solution to the major complication of the story by marrying Boaz. But, the scene ends with a new complication. Boaz is not the nearest of kin. The right of redemption should first be offered to another. This is the complication of the final scene, Ruth 4:1-20.

When Boaz offers the right of redemption to the nearer kinsman, he does not accept it. Boaz, now free to perform the right, redeems the inheritance and marries Ruth.

This outline indicates the plot development. The major complication arises at the death of Ruth's husband. Naomi offers her little hope that she can provide solution to the complication.

If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, would you therefore wait till they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying?³

Boaz solves the complication. The plot is that of a traditional love story: man meets woman; they marry. But, this simple plot is made more interesting by the complications of the several scenes.

Continuity. Another principle evident in the above outline is continuity. Events follow one upon the other in a logical sequence. What one learns from one scene explains an action or event in another scene. For example, the introduction of Boaz fits into the story because he is the owner of the field in which Ruth reaps grain. Since he is a relative, the reader is not surprized when in the end he performs the rights of redemption according to the custom of the day.

The above principles are evident in life stories. If a person wishes to explain his or her present, often a person will tell a story. The story frequently is made up of scenes which push the character along so that the

³Ruth 1:12-13

present situation makes sense. The principles of plot, conflict, complication and continuity help a persons structure his or her life story and thus find meaning.

Setting. Every story takes place somewhere and at some time. The action of characters is significant because of where and when it takes place. In another place or at another time actions will often have different meanings. The location in space or time often conjurs up feelings within the hearer.

The setting in time and space are important for Ruth. The story begins in a time of famine, a relatively common occurance in the biblical lands. Those for whom the story was originally written or told would know the consequences of famine and would understand with empathy why Elimelech moved his family to Moab in order to find food.

Since one of the points the story makes is that someone from outside the tribes of Israel can play a significant role in the national history, it is important that the setting be outside the borders of Israel. Ruth, a foremother of King David, was not an Israelite. She became part of Elimelech's family through marriage while he lived in Moab. The change of setting to Bethlehem, known after the time of the incidents in the narrative as the City of David, places emphasis on Ruth's role in Israel's history.

Time. As already noted, time is one of the aspects of setting. The location of the story within a specific time frame shapes its meaning. Had Elimelech left Bethlehem at a time other than during a famine, his action may have been suspect as unpatriotic. The author would have had to go to great lengths to make sure the readers understood Elimelech was in good standing in order for the story to accomplish its present purpose. As it stands, the author merely needed to call attention to famine in Bethlehem.

Time also functions to give structure and cohesiveness to a story. When Aristotle discussed the elements of technique, he maintained that all the action should occur within one day. In this way time functioned to keep a story within a very manageable limit. This limit has been expanded so that several days or even longer periods of time may be involved in a story. Nonetheless, time is still a structuring feature. Events follow one upon the other and happen in their proper sequence. Characters are developed in time and their actions become predictable based upon what has gone before in the story. Even abrupt changes in a character's behavior do not surprise a listener or reader if the story teller has revealed in the character something which interprets the present change or which is seen in a new light because of it.

Stories, then, are located in time. Further, time

is a structuring element that provides a manageable limit, orders sequence of events, and contributes to character development.

Action. Characters come alive through their action whether external or internal. External actions are those which can be observed. Internal actions include a character's reflections, thoughts and dreams. Hearers or readers identify with a character because of the character's actions. A reader or hearer often will see himself or herself in the character. One might even experience in one's imagination the feelings involved in being the character of a story.

Persons often tell part of their life story when they wish to convey their feelings or help another understand them. A hearer will more likely enter the story teller's feelings through a story than he or she will if the story teller simply were to state his or her feelings. The emotions involved shed an interpretive light upon the story. What the hearer feels will influence how he or she understands the character, actions and events of the story.

Description. A story teller gives the hearer the sensuous essentials of each scene by use of graphic descriptions. The reader experiences persons and places through what the narrator helps him or her see, hear, taste, smell or touch.

Characters. People relate to people. Characters make a story live for the hearer. He or she often sees himself or herself in one of the characters. A hearer can get inside of a story by living in or with one of its characters.

Bait. A story teller uses bait to hook the hearer so that he or she wants to hear more of the story. The bait in Ruth is the narration of Naomi's circumstances. She is in a foreign country where her husband and her sons have died. Her only companions are her son's widows. What is she going to do? The reader who asks this question is hooked.

Character introduction. Characters who are important to a story are usually introduced in the role they will play later in the story. Their introduction may be accomplished in several ways. Their names may be mentioned by other characters who converse with one another. A story teller might tell the hearers about a character's thoughts about a character who will appear later. A character might play a small part in an early scene and later play a critical role. Regardless of how the characters are introduced, their introduction usually occurs before they perform their actions critical to the story. In this way the hearer is prepared for the character's action.

Character development. Characters are often

developed through the thoughts, actions or reflections of other characters. The author of Ruth used both Naomi and Boaz to develop Ruth's character. The author indicated Ruth's resolve to stay with her mother-in-law by Naomi's reflection. The reader comes to appreciate this quality in Ruth's character because of Naomi's observation. Later the author used Boaz to further develop the central character when Boaz told her, "All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of worth."⁴

Persons will often incorporate the reflections of others into their life stories. Frequently they will use the reflections to indicate their agreement or disagreement with the characterization. Thus, by use of this technique persons can express their own self-understanding.

Hint or plant. This device is used to suggest a desired outcome of a story or scene or to prepare readers or hearers for subsequent action. An early statement of Naomi is a hint: "The Lord grant that you may find a home, each of you in the house of her husband!"⁵ The reader is thus prepared for what happens in the story and is satisfied with its conclusion, viz., Ruth marries Boaz.

Narration. Up to this point I have used narration

⁴Ruth 3:11.

⁵Ruth 1:9.

synonomously with story telling. As a principle of story telling, narration has a more specific definition. Much of a story unfolds as a story teller creates scenes in which characters act and talk with one another. A story teller helps the reader or hearer see what takes place through scenes. Narration, in the sense I am using it here, refers to what the story teller says about the events taking place in the story. Rather than painting a verbal picture, the story teller presents the action more quickly by simply telling what happened.

A story teller might also use narration to give the hearer information, especially information the hearer might not otherwise possess. Thus narration can be used both to move the story along very quickly and to provide information.

The author of Ruth used narration in both of these ways. He (she) narrated action as in the following example.

So she gleaned in the field until evening; then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. And she took it up and went into the city; she showed her mother-in-law what she had gleaned, and she also brought out and gave her what food she had left over after being satisfied.⁶

He (she) also used narration to explain a local custom:

Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging: to confirm a transaction, the one drew off his sandal and gave it to the other,⁷ and this was the manner of attesting in Israel.

⁶Ruth 2:17-18.

⁷Ruth 4:7.

Dialogue. This is one of the essential techniques a story teller uses to help the hearer imagine that he or she is seeing the action as it takes place. Characters speak for themselves. Through their speech they reveal their thoughts, feelings and attitudes. Boaz learned about Ruth through dialogue with the reapers. The author of Ruth used dialogue to establish for the reader the relationship that developed between Ruth and Boaz.

These principles come into play whenever one tells a story even one's own story. They are characteristic of story. These principles have an interpretive effect on the events narrated. The interpretation provides the story's meaning. The meaning of the story helps one understand the meaning of the events. When the events which make up the story are drawn from the life of an individual, the story helps the individual find and express meaning.

Principles or techniques of story telling influence the interpretive quality of story by governing how a story is told. What is included in a story also contributes to its interpretive quality. Only certain details are included in a story. Others are left out. For example, only minimal information about Boaz is included in Ruth. He is a landowner and a relative of Elimelech. As Elimelech's kinsman he becomes a redeemer. As a landowner he can provide an adequate life for Ruth. What details about him could the author have included that he (she) has not included? The

reader does not know. The author has related only what is essential for the reader to know about Boaz in order to understand his actions as they contribute to the story. The story teller was interested in Boaz only as he related to Ruth. Further, the story teller does not tell everything even about Ruth. He (she) tells the reader only those things that present a specific picture of her. The author seeks to interpret Ruth for the reader through the details he (she) selects.

This project seeks to uncover life stories based on remembered events. The details one selects to tell one's story have an interpretive effect. Persons sometimes tell their stories making deliberate selections of detail to influence the hearer's interpretation. For example, one might relate a detail of an automobile accident: "The driver of the other car plowed into the side of my car." The hearer concludes that the "other driver" was at fault. If the reporter chose not to disclose some information, e.g., that he or she ran a stop light and the other driver had the right of way, the omission significantly influenced the conclusion which the hearer drew.

Though selections of detail are often made deliberately to present the story teller in a particular light, selectivity in many instances is more subtle. Rather than setting out with the intention of presenting a story aimed

at a specific interpretation, a person seeks to report what "actually happened." And yet, not everything that happened is reported. One's memory of the past events may be inaccurate. One's perception of the events, even at their occurrence, may have been limited. The significance one attaches to particular details influences whether or not one will recall them. Significance may be contingent upon one's purpose for telling the story. One may tell a story to answer a question, to explain one's present situation, or to justify certain behavior or feelings. One's purpose for telling the story will thus affect the selections of details. These selections are not made, as in the above example, with the intent of presenting oneself in a particular light. Yet they have an interpretive effect.

I can illustrate this interpretive effect with a segment of my own life story. While I was in junior high school I experienced transformation from one who earned average grades (or below) to an honor student. I had been aware of this change from the time I entered high school, but it was not until about midway through high school that I began to seriously ask what accounted for the change. This question became the governing theme for my reflection.

One of the first stories I told myself to answer the question called up memories of the change of school, change of teachers and the experience of a new environment.

At the grade school I attended from third to sixth grade, I experienced my teachers as less than affirming. In fact, I experienced them as rather suspicious and withholding toward me. When I went to junior high school, I experienced much different treatment. I did not respond immediately. By that time I had been conditioned to respond negatively. But, by the second semester I had received enough affirmation that I was able to achieve the honor roll. I barely qualified, but my name was there. That was enough to provide incentive to spur me on until my name reached the top of the list.

When I began to ask what accounted for the change I observed, the above details were the ones I included in my story. The story I told was sufficient to answer the question for the time. As time passed, every once in awhile I would ask the question again. In these subsequent reflections I recalled details which had escaped me when I first considered the question. These details which I incorporated into my story helped me enlarge my understanding of what had happened.

The point of this illustration is that the selection of details influences one's interpretation of an experience. As I have indicated above by the example of the reporter of an accident, one can use selection to manipulate the interpretation. I have used my experience to show that

even where one does not set out with a preconceived notion of the desired interpretation, selectivity will still occur. And, the selected details influence interpretation and thus one's sense of meaning.

The interpretive quality of story is one of its characteristics. I have suggested that the interpretation of story is influenced by how the story is told and by what is included in it.

In this section I have addressed the question what is story. I began with a simple definition: story is a narrative sequence of events. To further qualify story I have considered two of its characteristics. The first was the meaning conveyed by story. By contrasting story with scientific language I have shown that the meaning conveyed by story is different than that conveyed by scientific "statements." The "meaning" conveyed by "statements" is contingent upon verification. Meaning conveyed by story includes subjective levels of understanding and interpretation. Through story one can express one's vision of reality and one's personal sense of meaning. The second characteristic I considered was the interpretive quality of story. How one expresses one's story and the details one includes in one's story influence interpretation. Thus, through story one brings to light one's sense of meaning.

ADEQUACY OF STORY

In the preceding section I have indicated that through stories one conveys one's vision of reality and one's personal sense of meaning. In this section I wish to define what I mean by vision of reality and personal sense of meaning. Because the meaning conveyed by story is different than "meaning" conveyed by "statements," the usefulness of verification to understand "meaning" is limited with regard to story. Therefore, in this section I shall consider the limitations of verification. Since the limitations of verification render it an ineffective means by which to critically evaluate story, in the final section I suggest tests of adequacy by which story can be critically evaluated.

One's Vision of Reality and Personal Sense of Meaning.

Through story one conveys one's vision of reality. Stories present verbal pictures. These pictures are reflections of one's perception of reality. Reality, as used here, is the quality of being real or having actual existence. Vision of reality is a metaphor. What one considers to be real is what one "sees" as real. Thus, by vision of reality I refer to what one believes to be real.

When one presents one's picture of reality, one makes a claim to its truth. How to verify or test the truth claims of one's picture of reality is a problem which I shall

discuss later in this section under the heading "Critical Evaluation of Story."

One's vision of reality includes what I call here "physical reality." It also includes what I call here "metaphysical reality." For the purpose of this discussion I shall define "physical reality" as the quality of existence in the external world. Objects of the senses or material objects which have their own existence independent of the senses of a knower make up physical reality. The planets, a tree, a glass of water are examples. Further, for the purpose of this discussion I shall define "metaphysical reality" as the quality of existence beyond the physical world. Principles or laws which explain the existence of physical reality, its relationships, or its behavior are included in metaphysical reality. For example, the notion of cause and effect would be included. Values are part of this reality. What makes something good, bad, pleasing, annoying, beautiful is a judgment of value. The judgment owes its existence to a mind which makes it. For the purpose of this discussion, I am assuming that value does not have existence in the physical world.

One's picture of reality reveals one's convictions, i.e., one's beliefs about reality. Some of the convictions may be religious convictions. For example, one might believe that God exists. Further, one might believe that

God's existence explains physical reality or metaphysical reality, i.e., God is creator, or God instituted the laws which explain reality. One's vision of reality, then, is a picture of what one believes to be real. One cannot tell one's life story without implicitly saying something about the shape of the world, one's relationship to it, one's values, or one's religious convictions.

One finds meaning in stories. Humans are inquisitive. They seek answers to their questions in stories. Stories arise to answer who we are individually and collectively, to answer questions about the world around us and our relation to it, to answer questions about God, to answer questions about what is important. As one tells life stories, one expresses one's own answers to these questions. These stories are thus expressions of one's personal sense of meaning.

One's vision of reality and one's sense of meaning are related. On the one hand, as one asks questions in search for meaning, one constructs answers in light of his or her vision of reality. The way one perceives reality and the relationships between its parts will provide the framework upon which the answers are constructed. On the other hand, as one asks questions of meaning, one often modifies one's vision of reality. The question itself might reveal to the asker new pieces which need to be fitted into

the picture. Or the question may help one see the picture in a new light. Thus, one's questions in search of meaning are answered out of one's vision of reality as they shape the picture.

Limitations of Verification.

I have defined vision of reality and personal sense of meaning in the foregoing to underscore the difference between meaning conveyed through story and "meaning" conveyed by "statements." This difference limits the usefulness of verification. Analytic philosophers maintain "meaning" is established by verification. "Statements" can be determined to be "true" or "false" by observation, experimentation or analysis of terms. Since much of what is conveyed by story cannot be verified, verification is not the most useful means for critically evaluating the meaning of story.

Before proposing an alternative means of critical evaluation for story, I shall suggest what in story is subject to verification. Some of the details of a story are subject to verification. Had I told a full story of my transition from elementary school to junior high school, the details of the story would be subject to verification. One could determine whether or not the events narrated actually happened and whether or not they occurred in the sequence I reported. To verify the details, however, misses

the point of the story. The meaning of the story does not lie in the "truth" or "falsity" of the details. It lies in the answer to my question, what accounts for transformation in my life. Thus, verification as a test of "meaning" is inadequate on two counts. First, only the "truth" or "falsity" of the details can be verified and therefore only the "meaning" of the details can be discovered. Second, the "truth" or "falsity" of the details is not what gives meaning to the story so verification of the details misses the point.

Through story persons express convictions of what they believe to be true. These convictions make a claim to truth, but in many instances all that can be verified is that a person or a community holds a given conviction. A person may tell a story that implies the person's conviction that an event a caused another event b. The person's belief can be verified, but not in every instance can the causal relationship between the events be verified.

What applies to convictions in general also applies to religious convictions which may be expressed in one's story. Among theologians, some seek to verify convictions such as "God exists" or "Jesus rose from the dead." The "truth" or "falsity" of such "statements" of conviction determine their "meaning" for those who seek verification. Other theologians would maintain that what can be verified

is that a community or individual holds a conviction to be true. For example, "John and Mary Doe believe Jesus rose from the dead" can be verified, but "Jesus rose from the dead" might not submit to verification. The meaning of "Jesus rose from the dead" is not contingent, from this point of view, upon verification but upon what John and Mary understand it to mean, how it fits into their vision of reality and how it influences their lives.

What emerges from this discussion is that what can be verified is limited. Details of a story can be verified. That an individual or community holds a particular conviction or set of convictions can be verified. But, the truth claim of many convictions is unverifiable. That is to say, a determination of their "truth" or "falsity" is unavailable through observation, experimentation or analysis of definition. Nonetheless, the convictions one holds to be true shape one's vision of reality and help one discover and express meaning.

Critical Evaluation of Story.

If verification and the categories "true" and "false" do not apply to story, how can one critically evaluate story? Critical evaluation of story centers in questions of adequacy. How adequately does story communicate by verbal picture one's vision of reality? How adequate are the answers which the story provides?

Through stories one communicates one's vision of reality. The critical question to be asked is how adequately does one's story communicate one's vision of reality. One can ask the question of one's own story or of another's story. Judgments regarding adequacy of one's vision of reality communicated by one's own story may be made on two levels.

On one level the adequacy can be judged in terms of how clearly the vision is transmitted. As another listens to the story, he or she may ask questions which indicate to the story teller that he or she has not made clear his or her vision of reality. The story teller may have left unexpressed part of the vision he or she assumes, but another does not see. Or perhaps the story teller has poorly expressed a portion of his or her vision. The adequacy of the story could be sharpened by clearer presentation.

On another level questions may challenge the story teller's vision of reality. As one listens to a story, he or she may judge that the picture of reality is inadequate. Perhaps the listener judges that it is distorted or that there are omissions. Perhaps the vision is too narrow or not sharply enough focused to make fine distinctions. The questions the listener asks, in this case, may offer a challenge to the sharpness of the vision of reality itself.

The critical evaluation of one's vision of reality

occurs on two levels. On one level judgment is made with regard to how well one's vision is presented. On another level the judgment is made with regard to what is included in one's vision of reality and how clearly it is in focus.

Through life stories one expresses his or her personal sense of meaning. One seeks to answer questions about the meaning of his or her experience, about the meaning of the world in which one lives and one's relation to it, about God, and about what is important. The answers one provides in one's life stories are developed out of one's vision of reality. Thus, the adequacy of one's vision will impinge upon the adequacy of one's answers to questions of meaning. Implicit in any test of the adequacy of the answers a story provides is a test of the adequacy of one's vision of reality.

Nonetheless, the adequacy of the answers one's story provides can be questioned. How adequate are the answers implicit in one's story to the questions of meaning? I am here concerned with four factors which influence a determination of the adequacy of the answers.

Time is one factor. At different moments in one's life pilgrimage what one considers adequate may vary. The outline of my story which I presented earlier indicates what was an adequate answer when I first told the story was inadequate after further reflection.

I suggested the inadequacy of my first story lay in

my neglect of details which I later recalled. The details included in a story are a second factor influencing adequacy.

A third factor is one's vision of reality. Included in one's vision of reality are one's convictions about the structure of reality, the relationships between the parts and the principles which explain the way things are. If one's vision of reality is not complete enough to substantiate solutions provided by one's story, the solutions are inadequate.

The logic used to move from the convictions one holds to an explanation of a particular event is a fourth factor. If the logic is faulty, the solution is inadequate.

In this section I have defined what I mean by one's vision of reality and personal sense of meaning. The point was to contrast the difference between meaning conveyed by story and "meaning" conveyed by "statements." This led in turn to a consideration of the limitations of verification. Very little of what is conveyed by story is subject to verification. Further, the meaning conveyed by story is not contingent upon verification. Verification is a means of critically understanding "statements," but it is insufficient for critically understanding stories. I have proposed that adequacy is a critical test applicable to story. In the next section I shall show how the tests of adequacy give story power to affect change. As persons

consider the adequacy of stories they are making judgments about the truth claims of the convictions expressed.

THE POWER OF STORY TO AFFECT CHANGE

Critical evaluation of a life story is the key to its power to affect change. Story is not argument. The truth claims implicit in a story frequently do not submit to verification. But, story is persuasive. As one evaluates the adequacy of a story whether one's own or that of another, one makes judgments about the truth claims of the convictions expressed. These judgments lead to change.

Story carries the power to affect change. In this section I shall consider the power of story to affect change both in the story teller and in the hearer.

Change in the Story Teller.

As we have seen story is a vehicle for communicating meaning on a level different from the "meaning" conveyed by "statements." The meaning provided by story helps one interpret one's life and one's relationship to family, social and political structures, to God and to the cosmos. The interpretation which story provides does not solely benefit the hearer. But, story also helps one understand and discover his or her own sense of meaning.

As one tells and retells one's story, one's under-

standing is likely to change. When one critically evaluates one's own story, he or she may discover inadequacies in the story. Such a discovery has the potential of stimulating one to make corrections. Some corrections may involve a more precise telling of the story. If the story does not adequately reflect one's vision of reality or does not adequately answer one's questions because it is poorly told, the correction involves sharpening one's presentation. Other corrections may involve modifications in one's picture of reality. In other words, narration of a particular experience may cause one to critically evaluate or reevaluate his or her conceptual constructs or convictions about reality. If one's vision of reality results in an inadequate story, one experiences an inner tension. The resolution of this tension may bring about a changed understanding.

Changes in the way one sees reality and one's own place in the picture will influence the way one acts in the world. This influence may affect a person's actions on three levels. It may affect what one does. That is, one might alter one's behavior. On another level, it may affect why one does what he or she does. That is, a change in one's vision of reality can change the motivation out of which one acts. Thirdly, the change might affect how one understands his or her actions. Since the significance of one's actions are interpreted in light of one's vision of reality, a change in one's vision will likely influence

one's understanding of one's actions.

Story, then, potentially has the power to change a story teller's vision of reality and his or her actions. This potential lies in the story teller's critical evaluation of the story. The tests of adequacy may cause one to discover inadequacies in one's vision of reality. Corrections or modifications in one's vision of reality can affect changes in what one does, in one's motivations, or in one's understanding of the meaning of one's actions.

Change in the Hearer.

When one tells a story, one offers an invitation to a hearer to participate in one's vision of reality. The story teller invites the hearer to see reality from another standpoint. As a hearer passes over to the standpoint of the story teller, the hearer opens himself or herself to the possibility of change.

Three steps are involved in the process of change. They are understanding, comparision, and modification. The first step is to understand the story of another. To understand another's story involves understanding the story within the context of another's vision of reality.

Comparision is the second step. "How does the story teller's vision of reality correspond with mine?" is a critical question for the hearer to ask. This comparision is often made quickly and without taking time to reflect.

This may account, at least in part, for a hearer's uneasiness with some stories or his or her rejection of some stories. The comparison may have been made instinctively. Without verbalizing a conflict between the two visions of reality, the hearer may have felt the conflict. The conflict results in the hearer's uneasiness with the story or rejection of it. This intuitive comparison may also account for a hearer's immediate empathy with some stories. The congruity, which the hearer experiences when the story is told, is so great that the hearer feels the story could be his or her own story.

A story calls forth comparison. As one sees himself or herself in the story of another, one quite naturally experiences this comparison as indicated in the preceding paragraph. I am here suggesting that the comparison become intentional and that one critically compare the story teller's vision of reality with his or her own. As one comes to understand the story of another, one sees the story teller's experience from the story teller's point of view. That is, the hearer sees the events of the story within the context of the teller's vision of reality and understands its meaning from that perspective. As the hearer imagines himself or herself in the story, he or she will imagine the story from his or her perspective as well as that of the teller. Thus, as one imagines the events of the story within these two contexts, i.e., the story teller's vision

of reality and the hearer's own, the hearer compares these two visions.

By asking questions of adequacy one can critically evaluate the story and one's own vision of reality. How adequately do the story teller's conceptions and convictions fit the story? If the hearer is convinced of the adequacy of the story, he or she will be inclined to accept the truth claims of the story teller's conceptions and convictions. These may challenge convictions of the hearer. If they do, the hearer might modify his or her vision of reality to include these conceptions or convictions as part of his or her own vision.

If the hearer is unconvinced of the adequacy of the story, he or she might dismiss the story altogether. However, he or she might not dismiss the story in which case he or she can still experience transformation. I would like to suggest two ways this might happen.

First, if one determines the story to be inadequate, he or she might ask how it could be made adequate. The hearer may discover that the convictions or conceptions of the teller must be modified to make the story adequate. These modifications might challenge the hearer's own vision of reality.

Second, something in the story might be sufficiently engaging that the hearer sees himself or herself within the story. The story has then become the hearer's story. The

critical questions which can bring about transformation in the story teller now apply for this story which has become the hearer's story.

The third step is modification. As one compares the story of another and evaluates his or her vision of reality, he or she may discover inadequacies. One may choose to correct the inadequacies one discovers. If one makes adjustments in one's vision of reality, one also affects change in one's life.

Story has power to affect change in the hearer. The change comes about as the result of a change in one's vision of reality. A story allows one to see reality from another perspective. Seeing reality from the standpoint of another gives one something with which to compare one's own vision of reality. The comparison helps one test the adequacy of one's own vision of reality and learn from another. If one discovers one's own vision of reality is inadequate, he or she might modify it. Modification of one's vision is in itself a change within a person. Further, as we have seen, modification of one's vision is likely to affect change in one's behavior, motivation and one's understanding of the significance of one's actions.

THE USE OF STORY IN THE LESSONS

In the preceding sections of this chapter I have been concerned with theoretical matters with regard to story.

Since story is central to this project, I have begun by considering what is story. I have given special attention to two of its characteristics. These characteristics suggest the importance of story for persons. Meaning conveyed by story, one of story's characteristics, is such that through stories persons can express their personal sense of meaning and their vision of reality. Because of the second characteristic of story, its interpretive quality, story is a means of discovery. Through story one interprets events and experiences for oneself and for others.

Throughout the preceding sections I have contrasted story with scientific language. The meaning conveyed by story is clearly seen when it is contrasted to "meaning" conveyed by "statements." This difference in meaning necessitates a different means of critical evaluation. Verification by observation, experimentation, or analysis of terms is the means to evaluate "statements" critically. I have shown that its usefulness with regard to story is limited and have proposed tests of adequacy to replace verification.

As one tests the adequacy of his or her own story or that of another, one opens oneself to the possibility of change. Tests of adequacy may cause one to discover inadequacies in one's own vision of reality. If one modifies one's vision of reality, one experiences transformation.

In this final section I shall show how these

theoretical considerations are applied in the lessons which follow. Through the activities of the lessons I seek to help persons bring their life stories into contact with the biblical stories. Thus, the lessons are structured so that persons will be involved with their story and the biblical story. The aim of some exercises is to encourage persons to evaluate their own stories critically. The aim of other activities is to help persons hear and critically evaluate the biblical stories. These two aims provide a context in which persons might experience transformation.

Evaluation of One's Own Story.

In the foregoing sections, I have suggested that one evaluate one's own story by asking questions of adequacy. How adequately does one's story communicate one's vision of reality? How adequate are the answers which the story provides? The questions a hearer asks of a story teller help the teller make judgments about his or her story's adequacy. Further, I have suggested that hearing another's story may challenge the hearer to test critically the adequacy of his or her vision of reality.

Exercises in the lessons have been included which involve persons in telling their stories. Some of these encourage persons to seek the feedback of a hearer. In this way, the teller can make judgments about the adequacy of

his or her story. Also, the hearer, in phrasing the question, may become aware of differences between his or her story and that of the story teller. These differences may challenge the adequacy of the hearer's story as well as the teller's. Thus, both teller and hearer are involved in testing the adequacy of their own story as well as that of the other.

Hear the Biblical Story.

The biblical story is given a special place in the lessons. The overall aim of the series is to help persons bring their story and the biblical story into dialogue.

Above I have indicated that as one listens to the story of another, one opens oneself to possible change. Some exercises of the lessons are intended to help persons hear the biblical story and thus open themselves to its potential power of transformation. The three steps which lead to change within a hearer are applicable as one hears the biblical story.

These steps are understanding, comparison and modification. One seeks to understand the biblical story by seeing the story from within the story teller's vision of reality. Next, one compares one's own vision of reality and sense of meaning with those of the biblical story. Finally, one might modify one's own vision of reality.

Experience Transformation.

If one alters one's vision of reality, one experiences transformation. One's vision of reality and sense of meaning are changed. Changes in one's vision of reality or sense of meaning affect change in one's behavior, motivation or understanding of the significance of his or her actions.

One of the ways a person's vision of reality is altered involves the integration of parts of another's vision into one's own. That is, as one evaluates the adequacy of another's story, if one is convinced of the adequacy of the vision and therefore accepts the truth claim of the convictions expressed, he or she may make these convictions part of his or her vision. The biblical stories receive emphasis in the lessons. They are the "other's" stories. Thus, as one accepts the adequacy of the convictions expressed in the biblical stories, he or she affirms their truth claims. Further, he or she may choose to integrate these convictions into his or her own vision of reality and sense of meaning.

Once one has integrated these convictions into one's own vision of reality, one will tell one's story under their influence. As one tells one's story, one reflects one's vision of reality and sense of meaning, i.e., one's convictions. In this way biblical convictions, which have now been incorporated into the life story, are transmitted

as one tells his or her story. Further, as one tells one's story, one interprets events and experience of his or her life in light of these newly incorporated convictions. As persons experience this kind of transformation, the aim of the series, i.e., to relate our stories and the biblical stories, is fulfilled.

CHAPTER III

SIX LESSONS FOR USE IN THE CHURCH

In the previous chapter I have laid a theoretical foundation for bringing our story and the biblical story together. This chapter contains six lessons intended to make the theory of the project available experientially. The lessons include activities and exercises which can be done in the classroom.

Some of the exercises focus on the life stories of the students. Others attempt to bring the biblical stories to bear on our stories. Still other exercises are intended to make certain knowledge or skills available to the class. The acquired knowledge or skill is used in succeeding exercises.

The flow of the lessons involves movement from life story to the biblical story, to life story, and finally to the biblical story. The focus of lesson one is each student's life story. The exercises are intended to help persons get in touch with episodes of their own life stories. Lessons two and three focus on the biblical story and their relation to life stories. Lessons four and five return to aspects of life story. The exercises of lesson four are intended to help persons discern the religious convictions expressed in their stories. In lesson five persons con-

sider how action is part of their story. In lesson six persons are encouraged to reflect on their learnings, especially to consider what changes have occurred in their story, and to ask where they can tell their story.

LESSON 1

DISCOVERING YOUR STORY

Lesson Objective.

The aim of this lesson is to help persons discover elements of their stories. One of the exercises of the lesson will involve introductions in which participants tell a part of their story. Another activity will involve: (a) looking back over personal histories to discover steppingstones from birth to present; (b) characterizing the present; and (c) projecting the future. In this activity persons will likely discover a sense of continuity in their lives.

Lesson Outline.

Approximate teaching time: 1½ hours.

- I. Personal introductions which involve relating a life experience.
- II. A look backward: significant events from birth to present.
- III. Characterizing the present.
 - A. A statement about one's present life situation.
 - B. Comparision of the past and present.
- IV. Projecting the future.

The Teaching Plan.

In this lesson persons learn by action and reflection. Persons will engage in an activity or series of activities and then pause to reflect.

Self-introduction is the first activity. The leader will suggest that persons introduce themselves by giving their names and then telling something about themselves. The leader may wish to introduce himself or herself first so that his or her introduction is a model. To help stimulate persons to think about what they might say in their introduction the leader might suggest one of the following questions or present more than one to give persons an option

- Would you tell about your most memorable experience?
- What has been the best thing that happened to you in the last year?
- What are some of the things you like to do? Would you tell about a time when you engaged in one of them?

There are several benefits with this kind of introduction. First, such an introduction sets the stage for future work in the class since persons experience telling a personal story. Second, people are set at ease. Third, participants learn something about one another. Even in groups which are made up of members who have known one another for sometime, members often gain new insight into the

lives of their friends. Fourth, people discover that the pieces of the story are readily available and that all have stories to tell.

After the introductions have been made, let people tell what they have learned from this exercise. They will likely uncover many of the benefits listed above. Some members of the group might also quite naturally turn the discussion to a consideration of the power of story noting that through story people often tell who they are or express feelings or values. The leader may wish to reflect on some of these issues from his or her own experience of the introductions or he or she may simply wish to allow the group to flow freely with the insights which emerge from the discussion.

The next step in the outline is "A look backward." Through the activity and reflection in this step persons look back upon the events in their past to find which ones stand out to them. These significant moments are called "steppingstones" throughout this lesson.

The leader will give a piece of paper to each person. All will sit quietly for a few minutes to think back upon their lives and try to relive in their imagination the feelings of their life as a whole. The leader will then ask them to make a list of ten or twelve steppingstones. The steppingstones should be written on the page without judgment or censorship. They are to be recorded as they

come. At this point order is not important. They need not be written out fully. A word, a phrase or a symbol that captures for the person the significance of an important moment in his or her life is sufficient. Steppingstones might include entries such as:

I was born.

I went to high school.

My vacation to Europe.

I remember my wedding.

The birth of my first child.

Divorce.

Tragedy struck.

There are no right or wrong responses. Whatever feels significant to the person is an adequate entry.

After persons have completed listing ten or twelve steppingstones, have them reread their lists to themselves. They may at this time wish to number the steppingstones so that they are in chronological sequence. But, no other editing is necessary.

The past often helps one make sense out of the present. Making a list of steppingstones focuses one's attention on events of the past. The leader will next turn people's attention to the present by instructing participants to sit quietly once again and think about the present.

After a short time, the leader will ask the class to write a phrase or sentence or two that describes the present. He or she might ask: "How would you characterize your present life situation? How do you feel about the present period in your life? The answer need not be elaborate. It might be something like:

I feel my life in transition.

I'm reaching my goals.

Facing crisis.

It's a real low point; a downer.

Any phrase, sentence or symbol that captures the person's feeling about the present or his or her relation to his or her situation is a good entry.

When everyone has written an answer, have each one silently reread his or her list of steppingstones once again. The past often helps one make sense out of the present. With this in mind, have each one compare his or her characterization of the present and the list of steppingstones. Is there any relationship between them? This simple question may be sufficient to stimulate reflection.

The leader may wish to encourage deeper reflection. He or she can ask persons to reread their lists and think about the whole host of events that are associated with each entry. Each entry is likely a tabloid for a cluster of memories about people who were important at the moment,

about significant places or engaging activities, about hopes or desires, and about feelings. The steppingstone entries are so pregnant with significance that persons could, if they chose, tell stories about each one. For now, however, this is not the goal. Rather, after having relived many experiences surrounding the steppingstones the leader will ask, "What events have you left out of your list of steppingstones?" Then the leader will ask, "Why did you choose the events you did at the exclusion of others?" Someone might answer that the steppingstones were selected from many events because the initial instruction called for a list of ten or twelve, not an exhaustive list. This is a valid observation and it may well be a contributing factor for omission. But, something more subtle is likely involved in the selection process. Could one's present situation have guided, at least to some extent, the selection? There is no need to give a dogmatic answer to this question. The question is not asked to precipitate a debate. It is asked to inquire into the relationship of the steppingstones to one's understanding of the present.

Some persons might find it interesting to remember this exercise and repeat it at some future time. One can then check whether or not in one's own experience a different feeling about the present will call forth a different list of steppingstones or at least different feelings about them.

So far in this lesson persons have considered the past events of their lives, their present situation, and the relationship between the two. Attention is now directed to the future. There is a principle in literature called continuity. It means that characters act consistently with things that have already happened in a story. For example, one would not expect a character in a story to act violently without some cause and without some earlier hint that he or she might respond with violence. Likewise, one would not expect a character who is in London to rescue someone in New York, unless he or she performs the rescue through an agent, by some instrumental means, or by first traveling to New York. The principle of continuity is at work in the stories persons live as well as in those they read and tell.

It is as if we were told, "You can move in any direction you want to, to any distance, at any speed, and by any means, but to get from here, where you are, to someplace else, you must go from here to there."¹

In the final exercise of this lesson, the leader will ask persons to think about where they want to be, what they want to do, in the next year or next five to ten years. Again phrases, sentences, or symbols are listed. After individuals have made their lists, give persons time to

¹Mary McDermott Shideler, "The Story-makers and the Story-tellers" Religion in Life 45:3 (Autumn 1976), 353.

consider how they might get where they are going from where they are presently. They may wish to write an answer or they may simply wish to contemplate silently.

After the self-introductions the activities in this lesson have been very individualistic. The work has been done independently with the leader giving instructions and persons making personal lists and personal reflection. Individuals may wish to share some of their reflections and learning with others. The leader can facilitate the fulfillment of this wish by simply asking participants to share their learnings with the group.

Suggestions for Extending the Lesson.

1. The leader may also wish to discuss with the class the influence of the future on one's life. Questions for discussion include:

- Can we determine our future?
- Must the future be like the past or can we have some influence upon it?
- Does the future in some ways shape our present?
If so, how?
- Must our future be continuation of our past?
- How does the "push" of the past and the "pull" of the future help us understand who we are?

2. Persons may wish to go back over their lists of

steppingstones and pick one of the entries to work on more extensively by trying to reexperience in their imagination significant people, places, events, interests, activities, or feelings associated with one or more of the steppingstones.

3. In this lesson persons have focused on their lives within three dimensions of time: past, present and future. Are there experiences in life where these dimensions are not relevant? You may wish to explore possibilities with the group.

LESSON 2

YOUR STORY AND THE BIBLICAL STORY

Lesson Objective.

The aim of this lesson is to interface our stories and the biblical story. The Bible, in recent theology, has been used in several different ways. Building on these uses, this lesson seeks to provide a variety of approaches to the relationship between our story and the biblical story.

Lesson Outline.

Approximate teaching time: 1½ hours.

- I. Asking doctrinal questions of the biblical story and our stories.
- II. The Bible as story.
 - A. Telling a biblical story to tell our story.
 - B. Following the pattern of a biblical story to tell our story.
 - C. Seeing ourselves as biblical characters.
- III. Using biblical images, symbols and myths to tell our story.

The Teaching Plan.

This lesson and the next attempt to bring the biblical

story to bear upon our story. Scripture has been used in several different ways by recent theologians. This lesson adapts these various contemporary uses of Scripture so that persons can attempt, with several approaches, to link their story and the biblical story.

The Bible has been used as a source book for doctrine. Around the turn of the century books on systematic theology were often structured around doctrinal themes. Chapters carried such titles as: The Doctrine of God, Sin, Salvation, Eschatology (the doctrine of the last things), or Ecclesiology (the doctrine of the church). The questions theologians attempted to answer were what doctrines can be discerned in the Bible and what does the Bible teach regarding those doctrines. The Bible was used as a source of doctrine. The Bible is still used in this way, though the number of authors who do this kind of work has greatly diminished.

The Bible is not primarily a handbook of doctrine. That is, one cannot go to the Bible and find a section where there is a treatise on sin or salvation or the like. To be sure, such doctrines underlie much of biblical material, but their presence is more often assumed than systematically argued.

At this point the leader may wish to introduce a biblical story and encourage persons to deduce doctrinal formulations. Mark 2:1-12 will work well for this purpose. After the group

has read the text together, the leader may ask some of the following questions to start discussion:

--What do we learn about the doctrine of sin from this story?

--What do we learn about God? About Christ?

--What do we learn about the way in which God works in human life?

One can also ask doctrinal questions of one's life stories. The leader can ask participants to recall part of their story. It may be one of the steppingstone periods, the self-introduction of the previous lesson, or some other part of the story that emerged from the last session. Or, it might be another experience that occurs to the individual. Participants can then ask the following questions about their stories. The leader may wish to add other questions to the list.

--What, if anything, does my story say about God or Christ?

--What, if anything, does my story say about my relationship to God?

--What, if anything, does my story say about God's work in my life?

--What does my story say about what I consider important?

--What does my story say about my relation to others?

The leader should instruct the participants to work in dyads. First one person tells his or her story to the other and then together they can ask the above questions. After awhile, they can work on the other partner's story.

Persons may wish to share with the group what doctrinal issues emerge from their stories. At this point, it may be well to see if there are any touch points with the biblical doctrines, either those in the story of Mark 2:1-12 or with other stories. Working with the whole group at this point has the advantage of "pooled knowledge." Something one person says may remind another person of an appropriate biblical story.

A second way the Bible has been used in recent theology is as story. Within the last decade emphasis has been placed on the story quality of much of the Bible. The Gospels, for example, contain many stories about Jesus. Acts contains stories about events in the life of the apostles and the early church. Much of the Old Testament contains stories of events in the lives of an ancient people and their heroes. One can use this insight to link one's story with biblical stories. I have proposed three ways one might attempt to bring one's story and the biblical story together.

First, one might seek to relate his or her story to a specific story in the Bible. That is, one might look for a biblical story that is his or her own story. Many third world Christians consider the Exodus story to be their story.

When they read or tell of the sons of Jacob and their families being delivered from Egypt, they look forward to their own deliverance. For them "Egypt" is oppressive governments and economic systems. "Exodus" means deliverance from oppression. They do not have to change the story or even point out in their retelling what are the analogues for "Egypt" or for "Exodus." Simply to tell the story as it is written conjures up the images from their own experience. The story is their story.

The leader should pause long enough to consider with the class whether or not there are particular biblical stories which when individuals tell them, they feel as though they are telling their own story.

Another way to use a biblical story is to model one's story after a biblical story. The story thus becomes a pattern for one's story. Just as one uses a pattern or blueprint to make an object, a biblical story becomes a pattern one can use to tell his or her story. I recall a sequence of events from my own life. When I was working on a graduate degree, I also served a church as one of its ministers. When I finished my graduate work, I was ready to go to my next assignment. At the time I was part of a church with a congregational polity so I sought a call from a local church. But, none was forthcoming. Yet, I felt strongly that my work at the church as well as at the school was

finished and I wanted to leave. I submitted my resignation. At a farewell party, I told members of the congregation that my wife and I were leaving but for now we were not sure where we were going. "We feel like Abraham and Sarah," I told them, "packing up to follow the voice of the Lord but not knowing where it might lead." I was consciously using the story of Abraham's departure from Ur as a pattern for my own story.

The leader can use the following questions with the class or can have persons work together in groups of two or three on the questions.

--Is the plot of your story similar to any of the biblical stories?

--Could you tell your story using the plot of a biblical story as your pattern?

A third way in which one's story might touch the biblical story is through one's identification with one of the biblical characters. The next lesson is devoted entirely to connecting our stories with the biblical stories in this way. For now it is sufficient to consider questions such as the following.

--Who are your favorite biblical characters? Do you see yourself or your situation in their lives?

--Are there biblical characters you dislike? What is it about them you dislike? Do they remind you of persons in your life? Do they in any way

remind you of yourself?

So far we have tried to link our story with the biblical story understanding the Bible as a source of doctrine and as story. We turn now to consider how one might use biblical images, symbols and myths to tell one's story.

Some persons will likely object to the use of the word "myth." This objection stems from the understanding that myth and history are mutually exclusive. That is, if a story is mythological, it cannot be historical and if it is historical, it should not be called mythical. "Myth" here is intended to convey that something about the story helps one put one's life in a larger context. In other words, the story helps one interpret his or her life or find meaning. That Jesus was crucified is a matter that can be investigated historically. But that his crucifixion was "on account of our trespasses" and that his resurrection is "for our justification" as St. Paul writes in his letter to the Romans is beyond historical verification. Yet, it is precisely this element of the story that makes it significant for Christians, who, according to Paul, participate in the death and resurrection of Christ.

Images and symbols, like myth, are significant in that they point to dimensions of reality that transcend the symbol or image itself. An example is the title, "Lord." The title refers to a political ruler. But, when applied

to Jesus as in the early Christian confession, "Jesus Christ is Lord," the title functions as symbol.

At this point the leader may wish to pause for a discussion about symbols, images, and myth. The point is not to define precisely symbol, image or myth nor to draw sharp distinctions. Rather, the point is to discover elements in the Bible which help persons see themselves in light of a larger picture. Questions for discussion include the following among others the leader or members of the group may wish to add.

- What symbols, images or myth help us understand how God works among humankind?
- How are our lives influenced by our understanding of biblical symbols, images or myths?
- How can biblical symbols, images and myths shape the way we tell our story?

Some people may feel illequipped to deal with these questions as they are phrased. The leader may choose to work with a specific symbol, image or myth, e.g., Kingdom of God, Messiah, Lord, Creation stories, the events of Christ's death and resurrection and the meaning attached to them in the New Testament. The questions listed above can be modified for use with these specific images, symbols and myths.

Suggestions for Extending the Lesson.

1. Symbols and images may be part of your personal

story. Sometimes elements in the story itself are symbols or images. Sometimes as persons tell the story they picture a symbol. Perhaps one envisions a scene or sees a picture, or thinks of a significant person as one tells his or her story. Sometimes one describes one's actions like those of an animal or in some other way makes use of an animal as a symbol. You may wish to consider what symbols and images lie behind your story. You may wish to carry this activity one step further by asking how these relate to biblical symbols and images.

2. You may wish to read selected portions of the Bible looking for symbols, images or myths that express the author's understanding of the relationship between God and humans.

LESSON 3

"PASSING OVER" TO THE STANDPOINT OF BIBLICAL CHARACTERS

Lesson Objective.

The aim of this lesson is to learn to see oneself in the biblical characters. One biblical story is used to demonstrate a method by which persons can identify with a biblical character.

Lesson Outline.

Approximate teaching time: 1½ hours.

- I. Background to Matthew 20:1-16.
- II. Identification with a biblical character.

The Teaching Plan.

This lesson makes use of the work of Walter Wink. He maintains that the Bible has lost its power to transform human life when Bible study is carried on only as a scholarly enterprise. To offer a corrective he has proposed a two pronged method of Bible study which combines the virtues of biblical scholarship and modern psychology. Accordingly, this lesson is divided into two parts. In the first part the class will consider the background of the story of Vineyard Laborers, Matthew 20:1-16, with the intent of understanding the story in light of the author's own message.

In the second part class members will use a particular method of application in order to relate their lives with the characters in the story.

Before proceeding with the lesson, take time to read the story aloud. Together the class can make observations about the way Matthew makes use of the story.

Modern scholars begin with the assumption, based on the evidence of their research, that stories such as this one were told and retold in various contexts before they were finally written down in the Gospels as we have them. When the story is placed in the Gospel in its present position its meaning is shaped by the stories around it. The author likely put the stories in their present order so that their acquired meaning would make the point he intended.

One of the first observations to be made about the position of the story is that it ends with the sentence: "So the last will be first, and the first last." This sentence is likely an emendation of the author. The story line clearly ends with the sentence before this one. By adding this conclusion the author makes a specific point. Apparently this point is important for the author since the preceding story in chapter 19:23-30 also ends with a similar expression: "But many that are first will be last, and the last first."

What point might the author have been making by the repetition of this idea? The story itself gives some clues. A vineyard is the central image. The image is used metaphor-

ically here and elsewhere in the teachings of Jesus. In the next chapter of Matthew, for example, there are two parables that use the image of vineyard. The image is also found in the Old Testament. For example, Isaiah used it to show the relationship between God and the people of Israel.² The people for whom Matthew wrote his Gospel, who were probably Jewish Christians, would have known the Old Testament usage of vineyard imagery. They would have understood that the image was used to speak about God's kingdom.

The story as told by Matthew makes the point to his Jewish Christian readers that others have also come into the kingdom. It is likely that some of the Jewish Christians were making an issue of their Jewish heritage and trying to claim a special position because of it. By use of this story Matthew calls attention to the fact that the householder accepted all laborers equally. Matthew's readers may have expected that since they were first in the kingdom, as Jews, they would receive special honor. The story offers a corrective.

People familiar with the Old Testament, as Matthew's Jewish readers would be, would also have appreciation for a detail of the story. At the end of the day the householder ordered his servants to pay the laborers. Leviticus 19:13

²Isaiah 5:1-7.

and Deuteronomy 24:15 record a law to the effect that an employer pay his laborers before the day's end.

The leader may wish to help the group investigate the passage and discover some of the above for themselves. The following questions for discussion are helpful for this purpose.

- Take note of the verses immediately preceding and immediately following this story. Do they shed any light on our understanding of the story?
- Have members of the class look up other instances where the image of a vineyard is important, e.g., Matthew 21:28-41; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 3:9-19; John 15:1-2; Isaiah 5:1-7. How do these verses help us understand this passage?
- Assuming that Matthew wrote his Gospel for a congregation made up largely of Jewish Christians, what might Matthew have been trying to communicate by this story?
- What is the significance of the editorial comment of the author, "So the last will be first, and the first last"?

The focus of attention for the first part of the lesson has been the question, what was the author trying to say to the original readers of the passage with this story. For the second part of the lesson, the focus is on the relation of the biblical story and our story. The believing

community ever since Old Testament times when the stories were passed orally from one generation to the next has attempted to relate the sacred story to its present situation. The same is true today. The method presented in this lesson makes use of a technique which has been developed in the field of psychology. The method has been adapted in order to help persons take on the role of a biblical character and thereby learn something about themselves and also open themselves to the power of the story to engage hearers.

In the activity which follows the leader will be able to work with only one person at a time. The leader will ask for a volunteer whom he or she will ask to take on the role of a particular character in the story. The leader and the volunteer will sit facing one another with the other members of the class situated so that they can see what is taking place.

The leader will attempt to help the volunteer to become the character of the story by asking a series of questions. The questions will vary from person to person and story to story. Once the volunteer has become the character in his or her imagination, the leader will ask the volunteer to tell the story from the perspective of the character expanding the story by adding details. This will call for imagination on the part of the volunteer. The leader may have to stimulate the volunteer's imagination

by asking questions. Throughout the process the leader will want to pay particular attention to the feelings which the volunteer expresses. These feelings may be expressed by words the volunteer chooses, by the tone of voice, by gestures or bodily movement.

To make these general instructions concrete the following verbatim is presented as an example.

Leader: Can you take on the role of one of the first persons hired at the third hour?

Volunteer: What do you mean?

Leader: As you recall, in the story there were some people who were hired at the third hour, others at the sixth and still a third group at the ninth, that is nine o'clock, noon and three o'clock. Can you be one of those who was hired at nine o'clock?

Volunteer: Okay, I'll try. (He stammers trying to begin.)

Leader: Tell us, where are you standing?

Volunteer: I'm standing in the market place.

Leader: What are you doing?

Volunteer: A group of men are talking.

Leader: You mean you are talking with a group?

Volunteer: Yes.

Leader: Can you say it that way? "I am talking ..."

Volunteer: I am talking with a group of men in the marketplace.

Leader: What are you talking about?

Volunteer: They are talking about the hard ...

Leader: Tell us as if you were one of the men.

Volunteer: We are talking about the hard economic times. We haven't been able to find work. We are wondering where work will come from. These concerns are interspersed with our jokes and small talk.

Leader: So you have been without work for sometime.

Volunteer: Yes.

Leader: What kind of hardships has that created for you?

Volunteer: Well, our savings accounts are depleted. We are living from hand to mouth. Everything I earn we spend right away. My children are hungry. My wife is upset. She keeps wondering how we will make it. I keep telling her that I know somehow we will. But, sometimes (pause followed by a mumbled sentence).

Leader: I could not quite make out your last sentence. Sometimes ...

Volunteer: Sometimes I wonder how we will.

Leader: Do I hear a note of discouragement in your voice?

Volunteer: I suppose so.

Leader: Can you tell us what happens next?

Volunteer: We saw a finely dressed man come into the marketplace. He first stopped to talk with some men who had gathered just a little further up the street. I saw some of them wave their hand and laugh. They turned and went away. The man continued to talk with those who stayed behind. He pointed over his shoulder in the direction from which he had come. And the men started off down the road. Then he came over to where we were standing. He wanted to know if we would work in his master's vineyard. Our first question was, "How much does he pay?"

Leader: Did you ask him?

Volunteer: No, someone else in our group. I don't remember who it was.

Leader: How much did he agree to pay?

Volunteer: He first offered us less than a denarius. We bartered with him until he agreed to pay us each a denarius.

Leader: Did you feel that was a fair wage?

Volunteer: It's what we agreed to. Actually, I would have liked a higher wage. But, a denarius is better than nothing. I couldn't take a chance that I would get another offer that day.

Leader: So then did you go to the vineyard?

Volunteer: Yes.

Leader: What did you do when you got there?

Volunteer: We entered our names on a log and we were taken immediately to the field where we picked grapes. We spent almost the whole day at it. We had a short time off at lunch time.

Leader: Were there others helping you?

Volunteer: Yes. Workers seemed to keep coming. Some very late in the afternoon.

Leader: So there were people who came to join you during the day.

Volunteer: Yes. It seems a large group came about noon and then another group about mid afternoon. And some stragglers all day long.

Leader: How did you feel when the others came?

Volunteer: Actually, I was relieved. There was a lot of work. It was a big field. After a few hours, it seemed like we would never finish. We could use all the help we could get.

Leader: Did you know any of those who had come to help?

Volunteer: Yes, a few of them. In fact, one was my neighbor. I knew he was having it rough, too. Both of us were without work and having a hard time making ends meet.

Leader: Then what happened? Did you work the rest of the day?

Volunteer: We worked until just about a half an hour

before the sun went down. The same man who had hired us in the marketplace called us to gather around him. He began to pay the day's wage.

Leader: Did you know how much everyone was getting paid?

Volunteer: Not at that time. He called out names starting with those who had come last. I thought that was strange. He would hand them something and then, I assumed, he asked them if they would come back to work the next day. At least when it was my turn, he asked if I would come back the next day.

Leader: What did you say to his invitation?

Volunteer: Like I told you before, I really needed work
badly so at that point I told him I would come back.

Leader: At that point? It sounds like you had a change of heart.

Volunteer: I sure did. On the way home, I met my neighbor who had worked only since mid afternoon. He was ecstatic. "I got a whole denarius for three hours work," he told me. He was beaming. I couldn't believe it! Here I had worked almost three times as long as he had and I only got a denarius. "You mean you got a whole denarius," I questioned. He assured me he had.

Leader: You were really upset.

Volunteer: You bet I was! He thought I had probably earned three times as much as he did. I could tell he was looking forward to a full day's pay tomorrow. When I told him I only received a denarius, he was really surprised. "Boy! did I get the good end of that deal!" he laughed. His answer and his laughter didn't help any. It just made me all the hotter.

Leader: Are you still angry?

Volunteer: You bet! I should have received more money. I was there three times as long, I put in three times as much work and my back hurt and had been hurting for a long time. I deserved more money.

Leader: Did you go back the next day?

Volunteer: Well, I got together with others who had gone to the vineyard the same time I did. I told them what I had learned. A couple of them said they had learned the same thing. That enraged us all. We decided we would go back the next day. But, not to work. We were going to let the boss know our anger.

Leader: What happened the next day?

Volunteer: When we got there some of us stopped others from signing the ledger. Others of us went to the boss' station and complained. A lot of shouting and angry words before he ever spoke.

Leader: Let me get this straight. You went with a group to protest. Part of the group set up a picket

line. Another part of the group went to complain to the boss.

Volunteer: "Complain" puts it very mildly, but you have the sequence right.

Leader: Which group were you in?

Volunteer: I went to the boss' quarters.

Leader: What was his response?

Volunteer: He acted untouched. He reminded us he had paid us what we had agreed. I couldn't tell if I saw a smile pass across his mouth or not.

Leader: What happened then?

Volunteer: More angry words. But it didn't help. I was afraid he was going to kick us off his property. But, he didn't. Well, not exactly. He said we could work for the day, if we wanted to, if not he demanded we leave.

Leader: What happened then? What did you do?

Volunteer: There were more angry words and shouting.

I just walked away after a short time. The hauranging kept on and on. Others came and joined in.

Leader: Sounds like you were discouraged.

Volunteer: I guess I was. It just didn't seem fair to me.

When the dialogue came to this rather natural stopping point, the leader suggested that the group debrief the

exercise. The leader began by asking the volunteer to reflect on the experience. He questioned the volunteer's feelings and asked if playing this role reminded him of any experience in his own life. He related that about one year ago he had been out of work for over a month because of a strike. He added that when he volunteered he thought he would merely play a game, but to his surprise when he had finished he realized that he had been telling his story. Particularly he relived the discouragement he felt when he left the picket lines day after day. This recollection was especially vivid at the end of the exercise. When asked how he felt during the exercise, he said he was aware of his vulnerability because he was in need. This feeling, too, rang true to his own experience. The leader reminded him that in the story the householder told the laborers that he had paid them what they mutually agreed upon. When the leader asked if the volunteer was satisfied with the householder's response, the volunteer answered that it did not satisfy. After the volunteer had been given opportunity to reflect on the exercise, the leader asked those who had watched if they wished to share their learnings and insights.

This second part of the lesson is a very creative part. It is hard to predict what will come of it. Different persons will bring different perspectives. The leader will have to depend upon the imagination and openness of the volunteer. Both the leader and the volunteer will find the

experience most successful if they open themselves to the spontaneity of the moment.

In light of the verbatim above, the general instructions to the leader can be amplified. The leader may have to remind the volunteer from time to time of the need to tell the story from the perspective of the character and to tell it in the first person. That is, the leader may have to help the volunteer become the character. The details that the leader calls for will often reflect the story of the volunteer. The volunteer's expression of feeling comes from two sources. Some feelings come as the volunteer plays the role. Other feelings come because the role reminds the person of his or her own experience. The volunteer's experience and feelings can be checked out during the exercise or the leader may wish to postpone this until after the exercise.

Suggestions for Extending the Lesson.

1. The leader may wish to repeat the process with other volunteers. Any of the characters can be the focus of attention. The leader may find it more interesting to use a character other than the hero or heroine since persons familiar with the story likely will have identified with the hero or heroine.

2. Members of the class may wish to use some of their favorite biblical stories to try this kind of exercise. The leader may suggest that persons reread their favorite story and the story they dislike the most between this and the next session and attempt to become one or more of the characters. They could report on the results of their study at the next meeting.

LESSON 4

EXPRESSING RELIGIOUS CONVICTIONS THROUGH YOUR STORY

Lesson Objective.

The aim of this lesson is to help persons discern the religious convictions in their story and then to compare these convictions with those in biblical stories.

Lesson Outline.

Approximate teaching time: 1 hour.

- I. Discovering the religious convictions in your story.
- II. Comparing religious convictions in your story with those in biblical stories.

The Teaching Plan.

One of the suggestions for the last lesson involved some independent work between sessions. If the leader has chosen to assign work between sessions, he or she should give the class members an opportunity to share their learnings. Simply asking if any one would like to share what he or she learned when he or she applied the technique used in the last session, will open the door for persons to share their insights. Whether or not persons were assigned homework between sessions, the nature of the exercise of the last lesson is such that persons often reflect on it after-

wards. The leader may wish to give class members an opportunity to share some of their after-class reflections.

In this lesson persons will work in twos or small groups to share their stories together. Each person will tell a story out of his or her life experience. The others will listen for the religious convictions which are implicit and will reflect to the story teller after he or she has told the story. Each person should have an opportunity to tell his or her story while the others listen and reflect. Persons should feel free to tell any part of their story although the leader may wish to suggest some topics. Those topics listed in lesson one or a topic growing out of the individual's steppingstones would be appropriate. Below are some alternate topics.

- Tell about your most memorable spiritual experience.
- Tell about an event in your life involving an important person to your spiritual development.
- Tell about an experience which reminds you of the experience of a biblical character.

After each person in the group has had a chance to tell his or her story and has heard the feedback from the listeners, the whole group may wish individuals to share what they have learned from the experience. The sharing might include reflection on these question.

- What did you learn about yourself?

--What did you learn about the religious convictions expressed in your story?

--Did you intend to convey a message by your story?

If so, did the listener hear your message? Did the listener hear a different message?

In the foregoing exercise persons have reflected on the religious convictions in their stories. Biblical stories also express their author's religious convictions. In the exercise which follows persons compare their convictions with those found in biblical stories. In the exercise of the last lesson persons started with the biblical story and brought their story to it. When they retold the biblical story as if one of its characters, the detail which was added likely came out of their life experiences. In this lesson persons have considered the religious convictions expressed in their own story. In the following exercise persons ask questions which encourage them to compare the biblical stories with their own stories.

Again the group can be subdivided so that persons work in dyads or small groups. Together these units can work on the following questions.

--Can you or anyone in your group think of biblical stories that express religious convictions similar to those expressed in your story?

--Can you or anyone in your group think of biblical

stories which reflect concerns that challenge your religious convictions.

The leader may wish to spend some time discussing with the class an assumption lying behind these two questions, viz., the Bible can be used to affirm our lifestyle, our actions or our beliefs or it can be used to challenge them. Unfortunately, no failsafe formula can be used which assures the Bible's message has been applied properly. As God's people, there are times persons need affirmation and there are times they need correction.

Suggestions for Extending the Lesson.

1. Symbols and images help persons express dimensions of their experience they cannot otherwise express. You may wish to explore some of the symbols or images of your story. The following questions can help you get started.

- What are the symbols or images of your story?
- Where do they come from (e.g., television, an influential book, a person)?
- Do these symbols or images express your religious convictions?

You may wish to compare these symbols with those used by biblical writers.

2. In the first exercise of this lesson the movement has been from story to religious convictions. Persons told stories and then sought to discern religious convictions

implicit in the story. You may wish to move from religious convictions to story. Begin by considering what are your religious convictions. Then ask, "Can I tell a life story in which I lived one or more of these convictions?"

LESSON 5

THE ACTION OF YOUR STORY

Lesson Objective.

The aim of this lesson is to help persons discover what convictions are expressed by their actions. Action is the grist of story and it is a central part of the story persons live. Since one's life is one's story, the exercises of this lesson are an attempt to help persons critically examine their actions.

Lesson Outline.

Approximate teaching time: 1½ hours.

- I. Lifestyle: The framework of action.
- II. Roles: One's formal actions.
- III. Choices: Actions one considers important.
- IV. Putting it all together.

The Teaching Plan.

Action characterizes story. What people do, feel, or think contributes to the engaging quality of story. When persons tell their stories, they tell about things they have done or about things that have happened to them. Through stories persons also tell about inward actions, i.e., what they feel or think about.

Our lives are our story. As persons live from day to day the story unfolds. Even cliches in everyday speech point to the relationship of actions and story. Someone who knows another might well say, "Your life is an open book." When persons start a new phase in their life, they might say, "I am beginning a new chapter." If one wants to forget an incident, one might say, "That is a closed book."

Our actions tell our story. The axiom, "your actions speak so loudly I cannot hear a word you are saying," is a reminder of how forcefully action proclaims one's life story. When persons reflect on their actions, they gain a new perspective on their story.

Our actions, reflected on, reveal what it is we really care about, more accurately than our words or aspirations about what we would like to care about. ... Action reveals being. Action is our most reliable mode of philosophizing. In action we declare our cosmology, our politics, our convictions and identity.³

Since action and story are so closely connected, the exercises of this lesson are intended to help persons consider the action of their lives. Special attention is given to the actions of lifestyle, to formal actions and to the choices one makes with regard to action.

The discussion and activities which focus attention

³Michael Novak, The Ascent of the Mountain, Flight of the Dove: An Invitation to Religious Studies (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), pp. 45-46.

on these three areas are intended to prime the pump. That is, persons are encouraged to look at these areas in order to begin to critically evaluate their actions. The final activity involves looking at the actions of a particular day in one's life. The questions suggested in the final activity aim at helping one reflect on the significance of one's story. The final question encourages persons to consider what religious convictions are expressed by one's actions.

Lifestyle: The framework of action.

Many activities are performed almost without thought or evaluation. Some of these actions have been learned through enculturation. One develops one's lifestyle to a large extent as one interacts with the culture. "Lifestyle" here refers to the overall pattern of one's life, as in the phrase, "American lifestyle." Descriptions that fit large numbers of people are handles for lifestyle. American, Christian, male, female, single, married are examples.

There are any number of labels persons could attach to themselves. And yet, not one of them is an accurate description. Most people feel as though they deviate from the norm in some way. This is one way people have to secure and affirm individuality. At the same time, the labels fit well enough that individuals participate in them to some

extent. Even at the points individuals feel they differ, the image of the norm helps one discover who he or she is. Without the image of the ideal personification of the label persons would be at a loss because it is in the comparison or contrast that one affirms oneself.

The class will find it profitable to make a list of these labels. For this part of the exercise the whole class could work together or persons could make individual lists. Once the list is compiled, individuals will complete the following steps alone.

The first step is to go over the list. If the list has been compiled by the group, each person will have to read it to himself or herself asking what labels apply. Now each one has a list, mental or written, of the lifestyle labels that fit him or her. Let each person think about his or her list. What images come to mind? What does the ideal personification of each label look like? How does he or she act? Take sufficient time to get a clear image. It may be helpful to jot down descriptive words or phrases.

The next step is to ask: "How do I feel about each word and the image it evokes as a description of myself? How does it fit? And, how am I different?"

After the class has completed this exercise the leader may wish to give persons an opportunity to share what they have learned about themselves and about their

lifestyle. Lifestyle is the framework for action.

Roles: One's formal actions.

In the preceding exercise persons gave consideration to the ideal personification of the lifestyle labels which fit them. Persons associate certain behavior and characteristics with each of the labels. These behaviors and personal characteristics make up the image one constructs of the ideal. Thus, if one says, "John is a good American," he or she means that John's behavior or character measures up well to his or her image of an American.

One might not give much thought to one's actions of lifestyle. That is, one might not critically consider whether one's actions are self chosen or prescribed by others as his or her lifestyle develops. One of the reasons for doing the preceding exercise is to ask this question.

Another place to look for actions which one might perform without critical consideration is in the roles one fulfills. Roles call for persons to follow various sets of rules. The actions involved are formal actions or rituals. These actions may range from a simple handshake when two people are introduced to the formal actions involved in welcoming foreign heads of state to Washington.

Everyone takes on certain roles and the attendant formal actions from time to time. Persons assume roles in

their social, family, vocational, political and religious life. Parent, head of the household, president of a service club, precinct worker are examples of roles persons assume. Have the class expand this list. When the list is completed, go back over it together and consider some of the actions associated with each role. Then have persons consider the following questions either individually or in small groups.

--Are you comfortable or uncomfortable with your roles and the attendant actions? What makes you so?

--Have you ever refused to perform any of the "expected" actions? If so, what were the consequences?

Choices: Actions one considers important.

The preceding exercises have been included to encourage reflection on actions that persons often perform by prescription. The actions which make up one's lifestyle are prescribed by the culture or the bearers of culture, particularly one's parents or teachers. Formal actions are prescribed by the role with which they are associated.

Persons also choose what they will do. Everyday people confront a myriad of choices. What they choose to do, refuse to do, or simply neglect to do makes a powerful statement about what they consider important. The exercises

which follow are intended to help persons reflect on their choices and to discern how values and religious convictions are expressed by action.

Some persons in the class may have discovered in their reflection on lifestyle and roles that they have refused to do some things which are expected of them. When thinking about lifestyle participants were to consider how they were like and unlike their personification of the lifestyles which fit them. Likely their answers had something to say about their actions and those of the imaginary ideal they held in their mind's eye. Differences may be accounted for in some instance because the individual chose to behave differently than the ideal. When considering roles participants were asked, "Have you ever refused to perform any of the 'expected' actions?" Those who answered, "Yes," probably indicated that they chose not to perform the action or actions.

The choices persons make reflect what is important to them. Some members of the class may wish to say more about their choices not to perform actions prescribed either by lifestyle or role. They may wish to give reasons for their choice. These reasons will likely be expressions of value.

Choice implies alternatives. One chooses to do one thing rather than another or one chooses in what order he or she will do what he or she does. Decisions to do one thing

or another and decisions of priority express value. Sometimes the choice to do one thing rather than another is made because of a preference for the chosen action. Other times one chooses to do one thing rather than another to avoid what one has not chosen. In either case the choice expresses value. If one knows what are the alternatives, one can determine whether he or she is choosing out of preference or choosing to avoid some other action.

By what one chooses to do one makes a statement about one's values. Further, one expresses one's vision of reality and one's religious convictions. Action is our story. It is also our declaration of faith.

One cannot act without implicitly imagining the shape of the world, the significance of one's own role, the place at which struggle is effectively joined. It is not true that faith, creed, convictions come first and then action. It is rather true that we are already acting long before we are clear about our ultimate convictions.⁴

As discussion has proceeded about the significance of choices persons make, class members likely recalled situations in which their choices of action expressed their value, vision of reality or religious convictions. The leader will want to give persons ample opportunity to share their choices. If they have not done so during the discussion, the leader may wish to encourage them to tell of their experiences at this point. The leader should encourage

⁴Ibid., p. 45.

those who share their experience to consider what values and religious convictions their story expresses.

Putting it all together.

In the preceding exercises persons have looked for instances in their experience which are examples of actions of lifestyle, formal actions or instances of choice. The examples may have come from experiences of yesterday, two weeks ago or five years ago. The discussions about lifestyle, formal action or choice pricked their memories.

The final activity of this lesson is to consider the actions of a specific day. What one has learned in the preceding exercises is incorporated to help persons understand their actions.

The leader will ask each person to think about a day in the preceding week and to make a list, as detailed as possible, of the day's activities. When everyone has finished making the list, the leader will ask each to reread his or her list and reflect further. The leader can use some of the following questions.

- Which activities are lifestyle activities?
- Which are formal actions of specific roles?
- What choices were involved in what you did?
- Imagine that you observed yourself performing your day's activities. What did your actions say?
- How do your story in action and your religious

convictions relate?

Suggestions for Extending the Lesson.

1. Novak has written, "Action is a declaration of faith."⁵ One might try to write a creed based on his or her actions. One might use what one has learned from the final exercise of the lesson about one's values, religious convictions and their vision of reality to write one's creed.

2. When one tries to recollect the events of a day in the past, one might not always recall accurately. To overcome this problem, the leader might suggest that the class repeat the last exercise between sessions making one change: keep a current log of a day's activities. That is, one enters one's activities in the log as he or she engages in them through out the day.

3. Not only do the actions of individuals tell a story; but, so do those of families, institutions, organizations (including churches) and governments. You may wish to consider the larger stories in which you participate asking some of the questions which have been suggested in this lesson.

⁵Ibid.

LESSON 6

CHANGE AND BE CHANGED

Lesson Objectives.

One aim of this lesson is to integrate the various parts of the series into a whole. The first part of the lesson allows class members to reflect on their learning with this aim in mind.

A second aim of this lesson is to look for ways in which persons might apply their learnings in the work of the church. The second part of the lesson is devoted to this aim.

Lesson Outline.

Approximate teaching time: 1 hour.

- I. Reflections on the experience.
- II. Where do I tell my story?

The Teaching Plan.

To affect change is one of the powers of story. Throughout the series persons have worked with their story, on the one hand, and the biblical stories, on the other. The intention has been to create a flow between the two. Whenever one interprets a biblical story one brings to it one's experience. What one brings to a biblical story

shapes one's understanding of it. In this series another possibility has been created. By using the biblical story in various ways in the exercises, its shaping influence has been brought to bear upon our story. In other words, the Bible interprets us.

If transformation influenced by the biblical story has occurred, the aim of this series that persons relate their stories to the biblical stories has been fulfilled in the highest sense. Story as it has been used in these lessons carries with it potential to affect change in other ways. Some of the exercises have helped persons focus on their stories and on the convictions expressed in their stories. They have also listened to the stories of others and have sought to give feedback to the story teller about the religious convictions in his or her story. Thus, persons have had opportunity to consider their own religious convictions and to compare their convictions with those of others.

The comparison carries the potential for change. As one compares one's story and the convictions implicit in it with another's story and convictions, one may discover new insights into reality. These new insights can cause the person to change.

Through story one interprets one's life experience. By telling a story of one's experience one expresses the

meaning of the experience. Thus, one's personal sense of meaning is discovered and expressed in story. As one tells and retells one's own story one discovers and expresses meaning. When one's story changes, the interpretation of events and experiences changes. One understands one's own life experience in new ways. One's story has a reflexive power. It can bring about change in the story teller.

In the preceding lesson, persons have examined the action of their story. They were asked to consider what their actions revealed about their values and religious convictions. Perhaps what some persons learned made them aware of areas in their lives they would like to change.

The aim of several exercises has been to help persons compare their stories with the biblical stories. Perhaps the comparison has caused some to abandon or modify their own convictions or has caused some to integrate a newly discovered conviction expressed in one of the biblical stories into their stories. Such a convictional change will result in changes on other levels.

The leader should give persons an opportunity to reflect on their learnings. In this way he or she underscores the transforming power of story. Questions that can be used to start the discussion include:

--What did you learn about yourself?

--What insights did you gain from the stories of others?

--Has your story changed? If so, how?

--What did you learn about the values and convictions expressed by your actions? Have you made any changes?

--Has the biblical story had an impact on your story? If so, in what way?

The last part of the session can be used to discuss where class members can use what they have learned through this series. In this way the power of story to bring about change through the ministry of persons is underscored. As persons share their stories, they invite others to participate in their vision of reality, values and religious convictions. This invitation presents the possibility of change.

"Where do I tell my story?" is the question the leader will encourage each person to ask. The leader may wish to research what opportunities are available in his or her church. Some areas to consider would be visitation, evangelism and personal witnessing. Further, since a primary task of both preaching and teaching is to bring our story and the biblical story into contact, the class may wish to explore ways in which their stories might be made available in these areas.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

In the introduction I indicated the impetus for this project. Many persons in the church experience frustration over being inarticulate about what they believe or hesitate to talk about their religious convictions. The awareness of this frustration and hesitency prompted me to seek a way to help interested persons overcome these obstacles.

Through the lessons, I have attempted to help persons bring their stories and the biblical stories together. As I indicated in chapter two, this aim is realized most fully when one integrates convictions from a biblical story into one's own vision of reality. The lessons provide exercises which move one toward this goal.

Some exercises involve persons with their stories. In these exercises persons test the adequacy of their stories. They may discover inadequacies. Such discovery may prompt them to make adjustments in the way they tell their story or in their vision of reality. Adjustments in the way a story is told influences the interpretation of story. Thus, the story's meaning changes. Consequently, one's understanding of the events or experiences narrated changes. Adjustments in one's vision of reality may also result in

changes in one's story which affect its meaning. Further, adjustments in one's vision of reality potentially affect change in one's convictions, one's behavior, one's motivation, and one's understanding of the significance of one's action.

Other exercises involve persons with the biblical stories. These exercises encourage persons to understand the biblical stories. To understand the biblical story one must hear it from within the story teller's vision of reality. The exercises further encourage persons to evaluate the adequacy of the biblical stories and to compare their own stories with the biblical stories, their own convictions with those of the biblical story.

Through comparison of their stories with biblical stories persons may be challenged to modify their vision of reality. They might abandon or change some of their own convictions or they might integrate biblical convictions into their own vision of reality. I have presented this transformation as if it takes place very rapidly. Indeed, it can, but it is far more likely that such change will take place over a long period of time. Such change is not easily made. It takes time to reflect, time to hear and rehear the biblical story, time to test and retest the adequacy of the story, and time to compare and compare again one's own story and the biblical story. Nonetheless, the biblical story carries with it transforming power. Transformation which is influenced by the biblical story and convictions

implicit in it is my hope for all who participate in this series of lessons. Those who experience such transformation have related their story and the biblical story in a way which fulfills the purpose of this project.

If persons experience transformation of this kind through these lessons, they will be better equipped to articulate their convictions. By doing the exercises they will have gained insight into their own convictions, will have modified their vision of reality in light of biblical convictions, and will have integrated biblical convictions into their vision of reality. Further, by experience they will have discovered story to be a powerful medium through which to convey religious convictions. Thus, they will know what are their religious convictions and they will have at their disposal a medium through which to express them.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Barr, James. "Story and History in Biblical Theology." Journal of Religion 56:1 (January 1976), 1-17.

Brown, Robert McAfee. Creative Dislocation--The Movement of Grace. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981.

_____. "My Story and 'The Story'." Theology Today 32:2 (July 1975), 166-73.

_____. "Story and Theology" in Philosophy of Religion and Theology: 1974, compiled by James Wm. McClendon, Jr. Missoula: Scholars Press, 1974.

Buckhan, John Wright. Religion as Experience. New York: Abingdon Press, 1922.

Buechner, Frederick. Telling the Truth. New York: Harper & Row, 1977.

Burrell, David. "Reading the Confessions of Augustine: An Exercise in Theological Understanding." Journal of Religion 50 (October 1970), 325-51.

Cobb, John B., Jr. Process Theology as Political Theology. Manchester, Eng.: Manchester University Press, 1982.

_____. "A Theology of Story: Crossan and Beardslee" in Orientation by Disorientation, Studies in Literary Criticism and Biblical Literature, edited by Richard A. Spenser. Pittsburg: Pickwick Press, 1980.

Cone, James H. "The Story Context of Black Theology." Theology Today 32:2 (July 1975), 144-50.

Craddock, Fred B. Overhearing the Gospel. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978.

Crites, Stephen, "Myth, Story and History" in A Meeting of Poets and Theologians to Discuss Parable, Myth and Language. Cambridge: Church Society for College Work, 1968.

_____. "The Narrative Quality of Experience." Journal of the American Academy of Religion 39:3 (September 1971), 291-311.

_____. In Parables. New York: Harper & Row, 1973.

Donovan, Peter. Interpreting Religious Experience. New York: Seabury Press, 1979.

Douglas, Jane. "Seminar: The Story Since the New Testament." Impact 6 (1981), 30-44.

Drury, John. "The Spirit of Story-telling." Theology 79 (March 1976), 77-83.

Dunne, John S. The City of the Gods. New York: Macmillan, 1965.

_____. A Search for God in Time and Memory. New York: Macmillan, 1969.

_____. Time and Myth. New York: Macmillan, 1973.

_____. The Way of All the Earth. New York: Macmillan, 1972.

Eliade, Mircea. Myths, Rites, Symbols: A Mircea Eliade Reader, edited by Wendel C. Beame and William C. Doty. New York: Harper & Row, 1976.

Estess, Ted L. "The Inenarrable Contraption: Reflections on the Metaphor of Story." Journal of the American Academy of Religion 42:3 (September 1974), 415-35.

Fackre, Gabriel. The Christian Story: A Narrative Interpretation of Basic Christian Doctrine. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978.

Fairchild, Roy W. Lifestory Conversations: New Dimensions in a Ministry of Evangelistic Calling. New York: United Presbyterian Church in the USA, 1980.

Frei, Hans. The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative. New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1974.

Freudenberger, C. Dean. "Seminar: From Story to Screen Play: Our Vision of the Future." Impact 6 (1981), 17-29.

Gold, Arthur R. "Exodus as Autobiography." Commentary 61,5 (May 1976), 46-51.

Groome, Thomas H. Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980.

Hauerwas, Stanley. "Story and Theology." Religion in Life 45:3 (Autumn 1976), 339-50.

- Hodder, Edwin. Truth in Story. London: Hodder, 1894.
- Holmes, Urban T. Ministry and Imagination. New York: Seabury Press, 1976.
- _____. To Speak of God: Theology for Beginners. New York: Seabury Press, 1974.
- Jones, Hugh O. "The Concept of Story and Theological Discourse." Scottish Journal of Theology 29:6 (1976), 415-33.
- Keen, Sam. To A Dancing God. New York: Harper & Row, 1970.
- _____, and Anne Valley Fox. Telling Your Story: A Guide to Who You Are and Who You Can Be. New York: Doubleday, 1973.
- Kelsey, David H. The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975.
- Kelsey, Morton T. Encounter With God. Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1975.
- Kort, Wesley A. Narrative Elements and Religious Meaning. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975.
- Langbaum, Robert. The Mysteries of Identity. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Lodder, James E. The Transforming Moment: Understanding Convictional Experiences. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981.
- Lynch, William F. Images of Faith: An Exploration of the Ironic Imagination. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973.
- McClendon, James Wm., Jr. Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974.
- _____, and James M. Smith. Understanding Religious Convictions. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975.
- Mack, Burton. "Seminar: The New Testament as Our Story." Impact 5 (1980), 15-24.
- Malits, Elena. "Theology as Biography." Horizons 1:1 (Fall 1974), 81-7.

Maslow, Abraham Harold. Religious, Value and Peak-experiences. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1964.

Meredith, Robert C., and John D. Fitzgerald. The Professional Story Writer and His Art. New York: Crowell, 1963.

Miller, David L. The New Polytheism. New York: Harper & Row, 1974.

Moore, Mary Elizabeth. "Seminar: Telling and Being the Story." Impact 5 (1980), 15-24.

Mouroux, Jean. The Christian Experience, An Introduction to a Theology. New York: Sheed, 1954.

Moran, Gabriel. The Present Revelation: The Search for Religious Foundations. New York: Herder & Herder, 1972.

Murphy, Carol R. Revelation and Experiences. Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Pamphlets, 1964.

Navone, John. Towards a Theology of Story. Slough, Eng.: St. Paul Publications, 1977.

Neihbur, Helmut Richard. The Meaning of Revelation. New York: Macmillan, 1955.

Novak, Michael. The Ascent of the Mountain, Flight of the Dove: An Invitation to Religious Studies. New York: Harper & Row, 1978.

_____. The Experience of Nothingness. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.

O'Collins, Gerald. "A Neglected Source for the Theology of Revelation." Gregorianum 57:4 (1976), 757-68.

Olney, James. Metaphors of Self, The Meaning of Autobiography. Trenton: Princeton University Press, 1972.

Osborn, Ronald E. "Seminar: Thinking Through the Story." Impact 6 (1981), 2-16.

Pascal, Roy. Design and Truth in Autobiography. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960.

Peeples, Edwin A. A Professional Storywriter's Handbook. New York: Doubleday, 1960.

Perls, Fritz. Gestalt Therapy Verbatim. Lafayette, CA: Real People Press, 1969.

Ritschl, Dietrich, and Hugh O. Jones. "Story" als Rohmaterial der Theologie. München: Kaiser, 1976.

Roth, Robert P. "Reality and Metaphor." Saint Luke's Journal of Theology 17:3 (June 1975), 223-47.

_____. Story and Reality: An Essay on Truth. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973.

Sanders, James A. God Has a Story, Too! Sermons in Context. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979.

Shea, John. Stories of God: An Unauthorized Biography. Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1978.

Schillebeeckx, Edward, and Bas van Israel, eds. Revelation and Experience. New York: Seabury Press, 1979.

Scholes, Robert, and Robert Kellog. The Nature of Narrative. London: Oxford University Press, 1966.

Shideler, Mary McDermott. "The Story-makers and the Story-tellers." Religion in Life 45:3 (Autumn 1976), 351-60.

Smith, Helen Reagan. Basic Story Techniques. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964.

Steuer, Axel D., and James Wm. McClendon, Jr., eds. Is God God? Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981.

TeSelle, Sallie. "Parable, Metaphor, and Theology." Journal of the American Academy of Religion 42:4 (1974), 630-45.

Wiggins, James B. "History as Narrative: Remembering Creatively" in Myth and the Crisis of Historical Consciousness, edited by Lee W. Gibbs and W. Taylor Stevensen. Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975.

_____. "Story" in Echoes of the Wordless Word, edited by Daniel Noel. Missoula: Scholars Press, 1973.

_____, Ed. Religion as Story. New York: Harper & Row, 1975.

Wink, Walter. The Bible in Human Transformation: Toward a New Paradigm for Biblical Study. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973.

_____. Transforming Bible Study: A Leader's Guide.
Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980.

Winguist, Charles E. Homecoming: Interpretation, Transformation and Individuation. Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978.

_____. Practical Hermeneutics: A Revised Agenda for Ministry. Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979.

_____. "The Act of Story-telling and the Self's Homecoming." Journal of the American Academy of Religion 42:1 (1974), 101-13.

Zuck, John E. "Tales of Wonder: Biblical Narrative, Myth, and Fairy Stories." Journal of the American Academy of Religion 44:2 (1976), 299-308.